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A PARISIAN SULTANA:

A TRANSLATION OF

ADOLPHE BELOT'S

"La Sultane Parisienne."

BY

H. MAINWARING DUNSTAN.

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BOOK III.

VENUS IN EBONY.

A PARISIAN SULTANA.

CHAPTER I.

It will not, we trust, have been forgotten that in the month of March, 1873, the Count de Pommerelle paid a visit to Dr. Desrioux, whom he found bowed down with grief, in consequence of the death of his mother. To his affection for her the young doctor had sacrificed his love for Madame de Guéran, his plans for accompanying her in her travels, and his most cherished hopes. In this state of almost despair he had begged M. de Pommerelle to take him away anywhere out of Paris.

The two friends met again at the funeral of Madame Desrioux. From the house of death they proceeded to the church, and thence to Père La Chaise. The Count at first considerately mingled with the crowd of relations and friends who had assembled to show the Doctor their sympathy with him in his distress. But as soon as the mournful ceremony was

over, and the concourse of people had taken their departure, some in mourning coaches, and others down the long avenues of the cemetery, M. de Pommerelle resumed his place at his friend's side, to which he was entitled by his daily association with the Doctor, by their ties of friendship, drawn closer and closer during the few past months, and by the words which had passed between them on the previous evening.

"By virtue of the powers you have yourself given me, I take possession of you," said the Count.

And, acting up to his words, he put his arm in that of M. Desrioux, and drew his grief-stricken friend away. At the gate of the cemetery they found a brougham in waiting, which, after half an hour's drive, deposited them in front of a small hotel in the Avenue Montaigne.

M. Desrioux alighted from the vehicle mechanically, ascended the steps, and, with his friend and host, entered a room on the ground floor. He appeared quite unconscious of how he had reached the hotel, or what he was doing. It was almost as if his mind, clinging to its former companionship with his mother, had sought a voluntary grave by her side, and as if his spirit had ascended to heaven with hers.

The Count felt bound to make an attempt to rouse him from this state of stupor and mental

lethargy, this physical and intellectual prostration, which not unfrequently follows upon excessive fatigue and prolonged experiences of sorrow. Placing himself right in front of M. Desrioux, and compelling the latter to look up, he said—

"You have fulfilled to the utmost every duty, both as a son and a physician. You have fought against death, and have been worsted in the fight. Now, what do you intend doing?"

M. Desrioux looked at him at first without taking in the sense of his words, but, on the question being repeated, he exclaimed—

"What am I going to do? I know not—I know not."

"But I do," said the Count, decidedly. "You are going to rejoin her whom, after your mother, you loved best in the world, by whose side, even if you cannot altogether forget the past, you will at all events suffer less acutely. You are going to set out for Africa, and endeavour to rejoin Madame de Guéran."

"No, no! do not let us speak of her now," exclaimed M. Desrioux, "I have no right to talk about her. I must devote myself to the memory of my mother. All my thoughts belong to her, and I cannot turn to any one else."

"Was not Madame de Guéran a favourite with your mother?" asked the Count.

"Oh! yes, a very great favourite."

"Then," replied M. de Pommerelle, "what

wrong can there be in your devoting yourself to one who was dear to her whom you have lost? It is a homage to the dead to think of all they loved here below. And have you not also told me that Madame Desrioux regretted your having remained with her in Paris, and your refusal to accompany Madame de Guéran?"

"Yes, in her thorough unselfishness and self-denial she did her best to induce me to go, and was never tired of urging me. 'Go, my dear boy,' she would say, 'go with that charming woman. I am not jealous, I love her as a daughter. I will take care of myself during your absence, I will not be guilty of any imprudence, but will watch over myself for your sake. You will find me on your return, sitting by the window in my arm chair, waiting for you, and ready to welcome you back with a smile and a kiss.' I did well," continued M. Desrioux, "not to listen to her. I should not have seen her again, and she would have looked for me at her bedside in vain. Her latest moments, soothed, perhaps, by my presence, would have been sad indeed had I been away."

"Be it so. You did well, I admit, to remain, but now you will be doing equally well to go away, because in that lies your only means of assuaging your grief. As a matter of fact, the idea was your own—did you not entreat me to take you away, far away?"

"Yes, that is true; and, possibly, with you,

and giving myself up entirely to your guidance, I might carry out the idea, but I have not the courage, at all events now, to tear myself away from the spots hallowed by her memory, and the tomb in which we have but just laid her."

"Who said anything about your going alone?" asked M. de Pommerelle. "What makes you think that I intend to give you up?"

"Do you mean to say," said the Doctor, in astonishment, "that you would go to Africa—you?"

"Yes, I—I will go to Africa. When one has been as far as Monaco, as I have been, one is capable of anything. Besides, did we not make up our minds to go, only our plans were nipped in the bud?"

"We certainly did map out a journey one evening, in a fit of passing excitement, but on the following morning we came to our senses, and released each other from the engagement."

"Say rather, my dear fellow, that you released yourself."

"That is true. But, tell me frankly—if I had started would you have come with me?"

"No, I would not, because for certain reasons, less weighty than yours, but serious enough from my point of view, I was compelled to remain where I was. These reasons have disappeared, and with them have vanished all my man-about-town proclivities, as well as that dislike to travelling which I have so often as-

sumed for the simple purpose of deceiving myself, and endeavouring to hide the heavy clogs and chains which held me fast, like a convict, in Paris. I will not do your sorrow the injustice of comparing it to the annoyance I have just undergone, but you have already experienced your severest shock; if you are destined still to suffer much, you will, at least, admit that you are not in any danger; neither your future nor your honour are menaced. My annoyance, on the contrary, is mingled with serious fears; I dread giving way to a ridiculous temptation, and committing an act of downright folly—in short, for I have no secrets from you, I am afraid of committing matrimony with a charming, but decidedly ineligible woman. Let us be off, then, as soon as ever we can; you, to distract your mind from its sorrow, and I, to run away from my own cowardice, and escape from what would almost amount to dishonour. Let us be off, I say again, in both our interests. I will take you to the woman you love, and who is worthy of your love; you will take me from the one I hate, and love, and, above all, fear. It is not one bit too much to put France, the Mediterranean, and the greater portion of Africa between her and me, for by so doing I shall be putting away from myself all possibility of return or cowardice. I know that I shall, perhaps, lose my life where we are going, but that is very little in comparison

with what I should certainly lose here. Africa, however cruel she may be, will have some consideration for me, and that is precisely what the fair lady in question has not. I prefer being physically eaten by the Niam-Niam to being morally devoured by that she-cannibal of the Boulevard Haussman. In a word, my dear fellow, just as a reformed rake, they say, makes a model husband, so a sedentary being like myself becomes, the very moment he turns wanderer, capable of any eccentricity, gives himself up to every extravagance, thinks no journey formidable enough, and would scale the moon, if she had not been for a considerable period placed out of reach of dilatory, and, for that very reason, over bold travellers like your humble servant."

M. de Pommerelle stopped at last, and waited to see the effect of his long harangue.

M. Desrioux reflected for a moment or two, and then, holding out his hand, he said—

"When shall we start?"

"When you like," replied the Count, "the sooner the better for you, for me, and for our friends, too, in case they should be in danger and need our assistance."

"I agree with you, but we must make some preparations."

"We can do all that in Africa, at the port of disembarkation. If we take money, and plenty of it, we shall be able to smooth away every

difficulty. Remember how Stanley, who was not at the time dreaming of Livingstone, made up his mind in twenty-four hours to join him. Let us show the Americans that, on occasion, we can be quite as expeditious and determined as they are."

"Very well. Only, it is not enough merely to go to Africa; we must go there to some purpose. What is to be our starting-point? Shall we follow the route taken by our friends?"

"That is just what we must avoid," replied M. de Pommerelle. "It would be the very way never to find them, seeing that they have six months' start of us. In their last letter, you will remember, they said, 'If instead of having received our information about M. de Guéran at Khartoum, we could have been furnished with it in France, our plan of action would have been altered considerably. In fact, if M. de Guéran has managed to cross the frontier of the Monbuttoos, we are destined simply to follow up his tracks without any chance of overtaking him. On the other hand, by setting foot in Africa at Zanzibar, and taking a north-westerly direction towards the Lakes Victoria and Albert, we should have undoubtedly met him, as he was travelling from a precisely opposite point. If we could start afresh, we should start from Zanzibar.' So, you see, we shall do what our friends could not, and we shall profit by their experience. Their argument

about M. de Guéran is equally applicable to themselves, because they have adopted the same route that he did. At Cairo, at Khartoum, in the district watered by the White Nile and the Bahr-el-Gazal, they have been seen, but nobody would be able to tell us what has become of them. To all our questions we could get but one reply. They were going towards the south-east—and we know that already from their letters. At Zanzibar, on the contrary, we shall either find them ready to embark on their return to Europe, or, if they are not there, we can set out to meet them."

"Your reasoning is good," said M. Desrioux, "and I agree to your plan."

"Do you agree, also, to my making the necessary arrangements for our very speedy departure?"

"Certainly. I give you full power."

"Then I shall engage a couple of berths on board the first steamer leaving for the Indian ocean. I have travelled along the map with you so frequently during the last six months that I know exactly what to do."

CHAPTER II.

Whilst the two friends, Dr. Desrioux and the Count de Pommerelle, were getting ready to set out for equatorial Africa, the European caravan, whose course we have followed up to now, escorted by the army of Munza, King of the Monbuttoos, was making its onward way through unknown tribes, in districts marked on the map by these words—unexplored regions. We resume the journal of the expedition, edited by M. Périères.

"To think that we should ever have complained of the slow progress of our caravan! We used to do our four or five leagues a day, and we even managed to get over from five to six when the country was open; now with Munza's army we scarcely move more than six or eight miles (English) in the twenty-four hours. We are, it is true, in the midst of innumerable water-courses, which, by their entwinings, form a net-work similar to that met with by Livingstone in other parts of Africa, and compared by him to the patterns formed by the frost on a window-pane.

The rainy season, now on the point of coming

to an end, appears desirous of leaving behind it lingering memorials of its stay in the provinces of the equator; it converts plains into marshes and makes every stream a river. For quite half our time we do not walk, we dabble. If we were to meet with a regular river, like the Gadda, for instance, a whole morning would be taken up in transporting the army from one bank to the other. There is, nevertheless, no lack of boatmen, numbers of them having joined us by Munza's order, and placed at our disposal not only their canoes, but also enormous trees, felled on the bank, and forming a raft or a floating bridge according to circumstances.

When it comes to making our way through a forest, our delays are even greater, an afternoon being frequently consumed in marching a league. The men are obliged to hew a passage with their axes through the dense thickets, destitute of even a track, for nature in a very few days conceals those which may from time to time be made. And yet, notwithstanding the difficulties which spring up without intermission when crossing these almost virgin forests, and in spite of the humid heat which is so oppressive underneath their leafy vaults, it is impossible to resist the temptation, every now and then, to stop and gaze around in admiration. The continuous showers have succeeded in making their way at last through the overhanging foliage and the interlacing creepers, and

everywhere flowers of every sort are in full bloom. Here the Ashantee pepper tree, with its coral berries, completely encircles the trunks of the trees ; there are garlands, rich festoons, clusters of flowers of a brilliant scarlet, and bell-flowers of bright orange, all sparkling in the darkness of the undergrowth, and apparently specially destined to give light to these profound solitudes wherein is an unending night.

As it is a matter of considerable difficulty to maintain a close surveillance over Munza's army or to preserve strict discipline on the march through this labyrinth, the men take advantage of the position to stray away amongst the least bushy thickets and, ever mindful of their appetites, to hunt everything, eatable and uneatable. One band of twenty or thirty men will make an attack on the chimpanzees, the usual denizens of these forests ; another lays siege with burning torches to a beehive, and swallows with equal greed the wax and the honey, and the insects which produce them. Here and there a solitary soldier will stumble across a regular town of ant-hills, from ten to twelve feet high, and, making a raid on the insects, crushes them in his hands, and eats them up.

In the villages our task is still more difficult, owing to the gross immorality which prevails throughout the kingdom of Munza, but, nevertheless, by dint of continually struggling against the powers of nature and the passions of man,

we contrive to traverse the tract which separates us from the district governed by Degberra, and encounter that chief on his way to meet us.

Though Munza has preserved an absolute silence as regards his brother, Nassar, some time ago, drew for us a gloomy enough portrait of this ruler. To begin with, Degberra is a parricide, neither more nor less. His father lived too long for him, and became a bore ; so he had him assassinated. But this crime, intended as a stepping stone to the Monbuttoo throne, was of advantage to Munza alone, who lost no time is assuming the crown, and made his brother merely his lieutenant or viceroy.

We are led to suppose that our host and friend is ignorant of the murder, from the circumstance that, since he has been secure on the throne, he does not appear to have thought of getting rid of his brother. A parricide would scarcely falter on his amiable way, and would not have recoiled, from excess of sensitiveness, before a convenient act of fratricide, almost marked out for him. It is quite possible, however, that Munza's conduct furnishes another instance of his tact; if he did not put Degberra out of the way, he took very good care to make him innocuous. Knowing that his brother was a slave to his passions, he furnished his harem with the prettiest women in the kingdom, and Degberra forgot politics in sensuality. He is now, consequently, an effeminate, listless being,

incapable of revolting against his sovereign, who, also, is a source of constant terror to him.

The meeting of the two brothers was utterly devoid of sentiment, and took place in our presence. The conversation between them, translated on the spot by Nassar, was of such importance to us, that I give it almost word for word—

"Why are you dressed in this fashion?" said Munza to his lieutenant. "You know that in my kingdom all my subjects, great and small, must wear the same style of dress."

Munza, who had noticed that his brother's head was arrayed in a species of silken turban, and that his feet were encased in Oriental slippers, was, in a roundabout way, leading the conversation into the channel interesting to himself.

Degberra, timid to excess in presence of the King, although amongst his own subjects he is a terrible despot, made some incoherent explanations, and wound up by saying that he had received the articles, as presents, from Aboo-Sammit.

"That is a lie," said Munza, roughly. "You got them from a white man who passed through your district some time ago, and of whom you have never spoken to me. Now you will have to tell me all about him."

Taken thus, at a disadvantage, the Viceroy was at a loss what to say. He turned towards

his officers, and was about to question them, but Munza gave a *sotto-voce* order to his own subordinates, and in a moment those in the service of Degberra were separated from their master, and isolated from each other.

We did not at first realise the full meaning of this manœuvre, but we very speedily came to the conclusion that it was both excellent and ingenious. In fact, if Degberra were to take it into his head to lie, all his myrmidons would repeat the same falsehood, and Munza would not be able to get at the truth. To learn that, he was first of all going to make the accused speak, and then he would examine the witnesses in turn. A *juge d' instruction*, or a judge of assize in France, would have adopted a similar course.

"Answer," said the King of the Monbuttoos to his brother, when the latter stood alone before him. "A stranger has resided in your dominions without my knowledge. Tell me everything you know about him. On that condition alone will I pardon you."

"Ask, and I will answer," replied Degberra.

"First of all, when was this white man with you?"

We had to pause for a reply. The most intelligent negroes have great difficulty in accounting for time. The new moon is the general basis of their calculations, which con-

sequently are rather indefinite, and often inaccurate. However, after considerable effort, Degberra managed to fix, very clearly, as far as we were concerned, the date when M. de Guéran passed through his district. This date agreed with the indications given by Nassar, as well as with the heading of the letter entrusted to him.

This first point settled, Munza proceeded to further details—

"Describe the white man to me," said he.

This question caused a general stir amongst us. We had, it may be remembered, described M. de Guéran as a father, and not as a husband. If he were described as young, Munza might begin by suspecting, and end by finding out the truth. But when a man's age is under consideration, the ideas of equatorial tribes differ from ours; amongst them a man is old at fifty, and, as the Baron de Guéran attained his fortieth year in 1872, Degberra would not dream of exhibiting him as a young man.

The portrait drawn by him was similar to that limned by Madame de Guéran for our benefit, and the emotion of our fair companion was almost painful to witness. Her tear-dimmed eyes, her pallor, and the whole expression of her face told their tale eloquently. Munza watched her narrowly, and, if he still had any lingering doubt about the truth of our tale, he was evidently now convinced that she

was in search of some one beloved, whose traces she had at length found.

The examination became, in consequence, closer and more searching.

"Whence came the stranger?" asked the King. "Had he crossed any portion of the kingdom before he arrived in your district?"

"No," replied Degberra, struggling with his faulty memory. "He never set foot in the western portion of your empire. He came from the north and, to reach the south, he passed through the Momvoo country, and over the mountains to the east of your possessions."

These words confirmed Nassar's statements; more than that, even his suppositions were, so to speak, certified to.

"And why," asked the King, with some severity, "did you not apprise me of the arrival of the white man?"

Degberra again hesitated, but warned by his brother's look that he had better obey, he answered—

"He begged me not to tell you. He feared you, and knew that you had prevented another traveller from going southwards."

"Why do you not say at once," exclaimed Munza, "that you were paid by him for your silence and your treason? You exact tribute from all foreigners, and, to avoid sharing it with me, you conceal from me the fact of their having been with you. But I have already told

you that I will pardon you on condition that you speak the truth. How long did your guest stay with you?"

"I do not remember," said Degberra. "From one moon to another, I think."

"Was his caravan a numerous one?"

"No; during his stay amongst the Zandeys, the small-pox committed great ravages amongst his soldiers and bearers."

"Did he appear to be in good health?"

"Yes, as long as he was with us; but he had suffered from fever in the marshes amongst other tribes."

All these questions took a long time to ask, and still longer to answer.

"You treated him well, at all events?" resumed Munza.

"I received him in my palace, and he was a constant source of amusement to my harem, for he made music all day long with an instrument he had with him which played of its own accord."

This was a very precious piece of information. Madame de Guéran was aware that her husband, just as he was about to leave for Africa, had bought a large musical box at a shop in Paris, and this evidently was the instrument alluded to by Degberra. The Baron, profiting by the experience gained in former travels, was bent, by means of music, upon getting into the good graces of the Africans.

At length, Munza thought the moment had arrived to put the crowning question for him and for us, the one which was to decide our future.

"In what direction," he said suddenly to his brother, "did the white man go when he left you? Which way did he take?"

In excitement and anxiety we awaited Degberra's reply.

CHAPTER III.

Instead of replying by word of mouth to his brother's question, he, with both hands, took hold of the lance on which he was leaning, stooped down, placed it on the ground, and, after a momentary hesitation, proceeded to set it. It is thus, as a rule, that the Africans indicate a route, or explain the position of any given place. The exactitude of this kind of compass is such, that, according to many travellers, the spot so indicated can be reached, even if it is a hundred leagues off, without any deviation.

As soon as the lance was motionless, we stooped down to ascertain its direction, and by the aid of our compasses, we perceived that it pointed to the south-east. This fresh piece of intelligence, furnished by Degberra, was an additional confirmation of the letter of M. de Guéran. The Baron had expressed his intention of making for the Blue Mountains mentioned by Baker, and these mountains lay due south-east.

We had, therefore, settled a most important point, for M. de Guéran spoke, also, of reach-

ing Lake Tanganyika southwards, or, if he went westwards, the provinces explored by Livingstone in his earlier travels, and leading to Congo on the Atlantic Ocean. It became evident, from the scraps of information collected in the Monbuttoo country, that the Baron had decided upon the first of these routes, by far the most simple, far less complicated than the other two, and much more rational, seeing that when once he was in Degberra's kingdom, lying east of the Monbuttoos, he was on the high road to Zanzibar.

Our host, however, extracted from his brother some details even more precise. The white man, when on the point of setting out, had asked a number of questions about the south-eastern tribes, and obtained all the information he possibly could from all the officers and others capable of giving any. In addition to this, he had persuaded Degberra to give him an escort to accompany him as far as the Domondoo frontier. This escort, after a ten days' march, left him, but saw that he was continuing his journey towards the south-east.

We could not possibly have obtained any indications more precise, trustworthy, and in conformity, at the same time, with our private information, our suppositions, and the probabilities of the case.

Munza, however, was not satisfied yet. He had his own reasons for mistrusting Degberra,

and for taking the evidence of his officers, adroitly placed out of earshot from the very commencement of the interview. He accordingly ordered them to be brought before him, informed them that if they deviated one hair's breadth from the truth, he would have them beheaded, and, having produced the desired effect with this mild threat, an advantageous substitute, perhaps, for the oath enacted from witnesses amongst us, he questioned them one after the other.

The fear inspired by the King, who was known to be pitiless when on a tour of inspection in his brother's territory, jogged the memories of even the most rebellious, loosened their tongues, and made every one inclined to be outspoken. The additional information gleaned from these people, served to confirm that already given by their master. It went further than that; it completed it by clearing up a still obscure point, and doing away with a doubt which harassed us to such an extent that we informed Munza of it.

It was difficult to understand how Degberra had allowed M. de Guéran to set out for the south simply because his guest had paid him tribute, and made him a few presents. The avarice of the Viceroy was notorious, but his bad faith was equally so; he would have taken the tribute and the presents, but would also have forbidden M. de Guéran to continue his

journey. Being fully aware of his brother's policy as regarded strangers, and sharing his dread of seeing them establish seribas and depôts amongst the tribes of the Equator, he would have paid little heed to keeping his word with a foreigner, if, by doing so, he ran the risk of displeasing his powerful and dreaded master. But, thanks to the statements made by his followers, we now knew, or, rather, divined why he had so graciously accorded to M. de Guéran a right of way through his territories.

The Baron, whilst his musical box was contributing to the pleasures of the Court, indulged in a few psychological studies, from which he gathered that Degberra was both sensual and fickle, and that any chance of a successful appeal to him lay through his passions. At the same time, the tales which had reached our ears, as I have mentioned already, were repeated in a far more detailed fashion in the Court of the Viceroy; it was in everybody's mouth that there was a country situated at the foot of the mountains, where all the women, so the tale ran, were far more lovely than the Monbuttoos. M. de Guéran saw at once the part he had to play, and when he had roused the curiosity and excitement of Degberra to a proper pitch, he proposed to set out for the south, make a razzia on these women, bring them captive northwards again, and exchange them with his host for elephants' tusks. The idea took the Viceroy's

fancy; he put implicit faith in the promises of the white man, and allowed him to depart under the guard, be it understood, of an escort, with orders to watch him narrowly, and if necessary, to bring him back. But when he reached the Domondoo country, M. de Guéran lost no time in getting rid of the escort, continuing his journey in solitude, disappearing altogether.

Such was the gist of the revelations made to us, and to them our imagination contributed in no small degree. But it was impossible to avoid believing the united testimony of the ministers and principal officers, more especially as their account tallied so exactly with the character and passions of Degberra.

We were considerably edified; the King of the Monbuttoos had played the part of *juge d'instruction* to perfection, and we felt bound to show him our satisfaction and our gratitude.

To sum up—there could no longer be any doubt that in the month of February in the preceding year, M. de Guéran was fairly within those unexplored regions which are bounded by the Blue Mountains. Had he been massacred by the tribes amongst whom his escort left him? Had he died of sickness or fatigue in that land so close to the equator? Was he a prisoner there? Or, after having reached the Blue Mountains, had he succeeded in crossing

them and reaching the beaten track? In this latter case he might have gained Zanzibar, have embarked there for Europe, and be awaiting Madame de Guéran in Paris.

All these hypotheses, reasonable in themselves, could have no effect on our route. Whether we continued our journey in search of our fellow-countryman, or made the best of our way back to France, we had, under existing circumstances, but one road before us, the one thus pointed out to us. This plan, moreover, appeared to suit Munza down to the ground, and that was a great thing. Towards the south-east, he would encounter tribes, on whose possessions he had already made several razzias, and whom he had intended to attack this year for the purpose of replenishing his stock of goats and cattle, animals not to be found in his own country. He was, consequently, not deviating in the least from his customary line of conduct, and his army would accept his proceedings as a matter of course. He might, indeed, have feared being drawn still farther onward in our behoof, but the negroes, however intelligent they may be, do not bother their heads about the future.

We did not make a long stay with Degberra, for the King appeared to have but little sympathy with his brother, and to wish to get away from him as soon as possible. He was also

too wise to expose his army to the seductions of the country.

The troops set forward on their march with incessant cries of *Pouchio! Pouchio!* which, being interpreted, means Meat! Meat! They were marching, in fact, against the possessors of countless herds of cattle, and against enemies who, in default of oxen and goats, were good to eat. After consulting with Munza, we decided to move towards the river Keebaly. This stream, as far as our information allows us to judge, takes its rise in the Blue Mountains, and if we can manage never to lose sight of it, it will guide us on our road, and lead us, as it were, by the hand.

It was decided also that, wherever we went, we should endeavour to question the chiefs of the tribes as we had done in the case of Degberra. The King, even if he could not succeed in obtaining any precise information amongst the neighbouring tribes, counted upon gaining some from one of his most powerful allies, the chief of the Maogoos or Maleggas. He did not conceal from us his fear that he should be unable to proceed any farther, if in this latter country we failed in discovering him of whom we were in search.

Our route did not admit of our taking a straight line through the land of the Akkas, a tribe of dwarfs whom Delange, now converted

into an enthusiastic explorer, was very anxious to see. But we marched along their western frontier, and, as the inhabitants of this region are tributaries, as well as allies, of Munza, we made the acquaintance of a number of specimens of this curious race of pygmies.

Schweinfurth, who saw them at Munza's Court, and not, as we did, in their own country, suggests that the Akkas are the famous pygmies mentioned by Herodotus. He does not give any decided opinion on this point, but he expresses himself satisfied that they are not an isolated tribe in equatorial Africa, but that they belong to an aboriginal race scattered here and there from the Indian to the Atlantic Ocean. I think that the German traveller is right; the wandering tribe of hunters described by Du Chaillu, whose average height he says is 4 feet 7 inches, only differs from the Akkas in the great growth of hair about the body. These pygmies may be connected, also, with the Matimbos, alluded to in the accounts of Escayrac de Lauture, the Kimos of Madagascar, and the Bushmen, natives of the South African forests. All these little beings are incontestably related to each other, as is also the case with the various cannibal tribes in different parts of Africa.

Schweinfurth thus relates the manner in which he became acquainted with the Akkas. "After a few mornings my attention was

arrested by a shouting in the camp, and I learned that Aboo-Sammit had surprised one of the pygmies in attendance upon the King, and was conveying him, in spite of a strenuous resistance, straight to my tent. I looked up, and there, sure enough, was the strange little creature, perched upon Sammit's right shoulder, nervously hugging his head, and casting glances of alarm in every direction. Sammit soon deposited him in the seat of honour. A royal interpreter was stationed at his side. Thus, at last, was I able veritably to feast my eyes upon a living embodiment of the myths of some thousand years!"

The European traveller put several questions to him, but, becoming very soon weary of this examination, the little man made a frantic bound, and took to flight. He was pursued, and caught; fresh persuasion was brought to bear upon him, and, his impatience being quelled, he was prevailed upon to go through a few evolutions of his war-dance. He was dressed in the rokko coat and plumed hat of the Monbuttoos, and was armed with a diminutive lance, and a bow and arrows in miniature. His agility was marvellous, and his attitudes so varied and grotesque that all the spectators held their sides with laughter. Our interpreter states that the Akkas jump about in the grass like grasshoppers, and that, when they can get near to an elephant, they shoot their arrows into its

eyes, and then drive their lances into its belly. We have never seen them disembowel an elephant, but we have learnt to our cost, or, rather, to Joseph's cost, that, most decidedly this trusty servant is predestined to every kind of misadventure, and is worthy of a special page in this veracious record, a space which, accordingly, I intend to devote to him.

CHAPTER IV.

We were joined on the 20th July by a small troop of Akkas, who had taken advantage of Munza's presence on their frontier to come and pay to him at one and the same time their homage and their annual tribute. As soon as the audience was at an end, the Akkas, as curious to see the white people as we were eager to set eyes on the pygmies, came to where we were.

After having got over their first feelings of timidity and alarm, they became by degrees more familiar with us, and de Morin turned their amiability to account by taking likenesses of several of them, whilst I jotted down in my memorandum-book the following particulars. Head, large and round, set on a thin, weak neck; height from 4 feet 5 inches to 4 feet 9 inches; arms long; upper part of the chest contracted, but widening out downwards to the huge stomach —paunch would be a better word; knees round and plump; hands small and elegant enough to excite the envy of Europeans even; a waddling gait, owing to the centre of gravity being shifted by the size of the stomach; skull wide,

and with a deep indentation at the base of the nose; chin receding; jaw pointed; hair short, and no beard whatever, notwithstanding the fable which endues the Akkas with flowing white beards, descending to their knees. After having pencilled down this portrait, I added these words—in spite of all their imperfections, these tiny beings do not resemble in any way the dwarfs exhibited amongst us at so much per head. Their deformity is, if I may so speak, natural, neither the result of any accident, nor phenomenal.

I closed my note-book, and did the honours of the tent, to the best of my ability, to our little visitors, so as to leave them a pleasing recollection of the celebrated white men, whose renown had penetrated even to them. Madame de Guéran gave them a few presents, Delange set himself seriously to work to study them from a phrenological point of view, and Miss Poles even, terribly severe on her own sex, but ever indulgent towards ours, treated these diminutive personages with all respect, declared that they were not at all bad in their way, and was especially eloquent on the intelligence of their expression.

As the Akkas, taking advantage of their diminutive stature and our kindness to them, very soon were guilty of certain indiscretions, we left them to themselves and our servants. Then it was that Joseph, emerging, theatrically

speaking, from the wings, appeared on the stage. Full as ever of importance and presumption, inflated with his own personal advantages, proud of his physical superiority, and deeming himself, as a white man, to be far above all the Africans put together, he took it into his head to hold an inspection of the Akkas.

He walked to and fro amongst them, did the very heavy swell, stroked his whiskers, and looked down with lofty contempt upon all these funny beings, the tallest of whom was about the height of a child of ten years old. From time to time he stopped in his perambulation to cast a contemptuous glance on those around him, grinning, as he did so, in an idiotic, imbecile manner, and here and there bestowing a back-handed slap, intended to be encouraging.

Several of the Akkas, serious old gentlemen, very grand personages, perhaps, in their own little way, speedily came to the conclusion that the white man was making fun of them, and they began to betray signs of impatience. Joseph was utterly blind to all this; not content with his promenading and grinning, he showed an inclination to play with his little companions, like a fat schoolmaster with the small urchins of his village. The game he invented to take the place of a ball or a hoop was not a very happy idea, for he took it into his head, after the manner of Gulliver, to convert himself into

a triumphal arch and make the newly-discovered Liliputians pass underneath it.

Some of them, good-tempered and entering into the spirit of the thing, joined in the game, but, all of a sudden, a man of about thirty, who had previously shown symptoms of annoyance at being treated like a child, and was now rendered positively furious by this final indignity, instead of passing beneath the triumphal arch, jumped on Joseph's back, clasped him round the neck with his arms, and bit his shoulder until it bled.

The pain was excessive, but it was nothing to the fear experienced by Joseph. The unexpected attack, and savage bite, conjured up all the ghosts of cannibalism which had haunted his troubled spirit for some time past. The Akka dwarfs, whom he had looked upon as harmless, disappeared ; he saw before him only gigantic cannibals; they were not biting him, they were not eating him up bit by bit; he was being swallowed wholesale.

He uttered the most piercing shrieks, and begged for mercy, but the Pygmy was quite comfortable pick-a-back, relished the flavour of his steed's shoulder, and gave himself up to it with all his heart, or, rather, with all his teeth, whilst the whole of his companions, with their little hands holding their fat stomachs, laughed all over their tiny faces, as they had seen Joseph do.

The more our servant struggled, the more he curvetted about in order to throw the Akka, the tighter the latter held on to his neck with his arms, and to his shoulder with his teeth. He used Joseph as a steed, spurred him with his heels, and made him run or stop as he pleased, clasping him round the neck more and more firmly, and digging his teeth into him with increasing ferocity. Joseph wanted a game, so that he had no right to complain. He was playing at horses, only he was the steed, and the Akka the rider.

And what a rider! It was impossible to unhorse him. His steed, recalling the way a donkey has of rolling on his back, with his four legs in the air, lay down at full length and attempted to crush his jockey under his weight. But the skilful cavalier was quite up to that move; he slid round in front, and when Joseph got up the Akka was face to face with him, with his little eyes glistening, and every pointed tooth showing.

At last Joseph's piercing shrieks attracted the attention of some Monbuttoo soldiers. Seeing what was taking place, and having themselves, possibly, marked Joseph down as a toothsome morsel in case provisions should run short, they rescued him from the grinders of the dwarf, so that at all events a little bit of him might be left.

On the day after this occurrence, Joseph,

whose head had been troubling him, was seized with a raging fever, accompanied by contractions of the muscles, and severe cramp. In the height of this fever, he imagined that he had been bitten by some mad animal, and that he had himself gone mad in consequence. "Get away," he shouted, "get away, I shall bite you!" Dr. Delange, though he did not fear rabies, which is nearly unknown in Africa, was at first alarmed by the violence of the delirium, but Nassar informed us that it was almost an invariable feature in the disease from which Joseph was suffering, peculiar to this climate, and called *kichyoma*.

The sorcerers and fetish-mongers of every description who followed the army, hastened to offer their services on behalf of the sufferer, but we sent them away, after overwhelming them with thanks and presents, for in Africa it is indispensably necessary to keep these quacks, often more powerful than even the chiefs, in a good humour.

Delange is quite equal to the task of restoring his patient to health, but if he is so restored, he will not be cured. He is sure to meet with some fresh disaster; indeed, he appears to be making a collection of them.

August 2nd.—We are in a hostile country, amongst the Domondoos. The inhabitants took to flight at our approach, abandoning all their possessions to the rapacity and, above all,

the voracity of the Monbuttoos, who laid violent hands on fowls, goats, glass beads, ivory, skins, and tobacco. We are on a regular thieving expedition.

Munza is nearly always close to us, grave, thoughtful, often taciturn. He takes no part in the lawless proceedings of his army; but, though he appears to repudiate them, he does nothing to stop them.

"If I were to forbid them to rob and eat," said he one day to Madame de Guéran, "they would think I was mad, and would refuse to follow me. For your sakes I must not choose this time to reform the manners of my people."

He was wise in his generation, and he might have added that to bring about any reformation in African manners would be a task of considerable difficulty. The further we go the more disheartened we become on the subject. When we reflect that this people, old as the hills, has stood still for centuries—nay, that, on the contrary, it has gone backward to the utmost extreme of barbarism! For one man possessed of intelligence, and displaying more civilization than the remainder, such as Munza, for instance, we see every moment of our lives scores of brutes, neither more nor less. From a tribe like that of the Monbuttoos, considerably ahead of their neighbours, we pass suddenly to the Domondoos, who differ from animals simply in their power of speech.

If they had only an idea of fighting, by which they live, or, more truly die, but they have not even that. For countless years past the Monbuttoos have been in the habit of making a descent upon their territory at certain fixed periods, when they rob them, plunder, kill, and eat them, and not even yet have they been able to see that nothing would be easier than to exterminate and get rid, once and for all, of their dreaded invaders. Five or six hundred men hidden in the high grass, which in this country would afford cover for a whole army, screened by the gigantic trees, sheltered by the rocks on the Keebaly, or posted on the rising ground, which the enemy must skirt, would be ample to protect a country such as this, admirably adapted for defensive operations, and almost impregnable. But no—no sooner do they catch sight of the enemy than away they run, abandoning everything they possess, without even thinking of carrying off their most valuable treasures and hiding them in the mountains. Then all the fugitives collect together, and in a compact body engage the army of the Monbuttoos on open ground, where their bodies are just so many targets. The fight begins, it lasts for a few hours at most, and all is over ; the Monbuttoos march off with their plunder and a thousand prisoners, to return in the following year at exactly the same period, and once more leave their cards on their neighbours.

This description was verified to the letter, and we came upon them in number about five or six thousand, in close order like ears of corn in a field, gesticulating, shouting, and beating their drums. We had only to open fire upon them with our sixty rifles, every bullet from which would find a billet in the ruck, and we should have laid the whole army low in ten minutes.

But they need not be uneasy; we are not going to take part in the massacre. It is a matter entirely between the Monbuttoos and the Domondoos, and we Europeans have nothing whatever to do with it. Nevertheless, the Nubians and Dinkas of our escort were eager to fight. Neither our society, which they had enjoyed for six months, the examples of moderation and humanity we had given them, nor their own semi-civilized state could subdue their warlike nature; the old original African blood rushed to their heads, and they felt impelled to put themselves in motion, to shout, strike, and kill.

They came round us and begged permission to fight. "What will the Monbuttoos think of us," said they, "if we do not help them?"

"Fight away, my friends, fight away!" replied de Morin, and he served out to each man ten rounds of blank cartridge, which he had prepared on the previous evening expressly for

this purpose. They could thus make plenty of noise and not hurt anybody.

We ourselves, armed with telescopes, followed from a distance the varying fortunes of the battle. If it went against our allies, then, and then alone, would we interfere. We did not consider that we could well do otherwise.

The arrows began to whiz through the air; the battle had begun. Attention !

CHAPTER V.

In the retreat we had chosen, on the flank, and about three hundred yards from both armies, no arrow, however badly aimed, could reach us, protected as we were by spreading, lofty trees. But if by means of our telescopes, we could follow the movements of the troops, take account of their manœuvres, and distinguish them in the mass, all the details of the battle escaped us. We were looking down upon a *mêlée* on a large scale, but we could take no note of the curious incidents of the fray.

"We are too far off!" de Morin persisted in saying. He was in such a state of excitement that he could not keep still, but was continually moving about and venturing into the open.

Nobody took the trouble to answer him, for the simple reason that there was nothing to say. We knew that we were too far off to see well, but we were quite near enough for safety, and that was all we cared about.

After having taken one or two turns round the trees, de Morin, still harping on his one fixed idea, came up to us and said—

"If we could only manage to catch sight of

the king from this observatory of ours! Politeness alone would seem to dictate our contriving to witness his prowess."

"I am a witness already," I replied, "and it only depends on yourself to enjoy the self-same sight. If instead of pacing about in that idiotic manner, you would keep quiet for a moment, you would see the great Munza, towering with his head and plumed hat above all his guard of honour. He has plunged into the thick of the fight, and has already cleared a large space around him. See, he turns towards us, as if to say, 'I fight for you!'"

My last words were ill-judged, and I saw it as soon as they were out of my mouth.

"That is just my reason," cried de Morin, "for chafing at not being by his side. He exposes his life for us, and—"

To remedy my error, I hastened to say—

"My dear fellow, he exposes himself because it is his duty to fight at the head of his men. The chiefs of the Niam-Niam alone, amongst all the black tribes, hold aloof during a battle, ready to hide themselves, their wives, and their treasures in the most accessible marshes, should fortune declare against them. They never appear except to share in the plunder; but the King of the Monbuttoos belongs to quite another class."

"If you were to say," added Miss Poles, who for some time past had invariably spoken of

Munza in terms of the utmost contempt, "that this savage has the most disgusting tastes, and is in his element amidst fire and sword, you would be giving the true reason of his rushing headlong into the fray."

De Morin did not hear this malicious speech, emanating from wounded pride, and continued his feverish, excited walk up and down an open space in front of some banana trees. Anyone who knew de Morin would have been pretty sure that he was revolving some scheme in his head.

Suddenly he stopped, and turning towards us, asked us whether we had not been struck with the expressions made use of by the Nubians.

"What expressions?" said Madame de Guéran.

"They told us that they would be despised by the Monbuttoos if they did not fight with them."

"Yes; but what of that?"

"I am afraid," replied our friend, with some hesitation, "that if we remain passive, they will despise us also."

"Do you mean to say that you care about the contempt of the Monbuttoos? Oh, M. de Morin!" said Miss Poles, with lofty disdain.

The grievance of Miss Beatrice against Munza made her unjust as regards his subjects; in her anger, hatred, and malice she

tarred the King and his army with the same brush.

Without taking any notice of the remark of our eccentric companion, I observed to de Morin that we had no right to massacre these brave Domandoos, against whom we could not possibly have any ground of complaint.

"I never said a word about massacring them," replied de Morin. "But we ought to take the command of our Nubians. They are, as you see, behaving very prudently, and await our orders to fire; we could do what we liked with them."

"Nassar is quite capable of leading them," said Madame de Guéran. "Believe me," she added with a smile, "we shall be doing right by observing strict neutrality in this affair. You will have other opportunities, and very soon, perhaps, of fighting on your own account."

Unfortunately, the Baroness, after uttering this sage advice, strolled away with Miss Poles to seek shelter from the sun under a large sycamore tree.

Her presence had up to this time kept our friend's excitement within bounds; but as soon as he was no longer subject to this salutary influence, he lost his head completely, as he sometimes did, without showing the slightest symptom of the fact. The dear old donkey was never so clear in argument, so cool, or so

collected as when he was meditating some act of downright folly.

This time he tried to make Delange his excuse. He knew very well that he was in no danger of reckoning without his host; the Doctor, wise and prudent at the commencement of the expedition, had now occasionally his moments of mild insanity, as if he had had a sunstroke.

"You will doubtless remember," said de Morin to him, "that one evening when I was tranquilly smoking my pipe in the hut with Périères, you compelled me to get up and follow you into the shed constructed for Munza's eighty wives."

"Do I remember!" replied Delange. "We had a charming game of bezique, with the women on one side and Bengal lights on the other. I was quite justified in disturbing you as I took the liberty of doing. I had lost on the previous night."

"I never said you were wrong. But, if I am not mistaken, you won the game you mention, and ever since then fortune has smiled incessantly upon you. Yesterday, again, I lost at piquet."

"I should never, of my own accord, have summoned up these sad memories," replied Delange; "but as you have mentioned them—why, yes, my debt to you has by this time be-

come trifling—a matter of a few thousand francs at the outside."

"Shall we play double or quits?" suggested de Morin, suddenly.

Delange's eyes sparkled, and he brightened up directly, though, for the sake of appearances, he felt bound to say—

"Have we any right to infringe one of the most formal clauses of our treaty?"

"Hang the treaty!" replied de Morin. "It is such an old affair. Besides, if we are both of the same mind we can cancel it at any time."

"Oh, quite so. I am only speaking, as you can see clearly enough, in your interest. I am in luck—"

"Pray do not stand on any ceremony with me, for I have a presentiment that I shall win."

"We will see about that."

"Then do not let us lose any time about it."

"With all my heart. Here are our cards—they never leave me—and the trunk of this old tree will do for a card-table."

"What! You propose playing here, well under cover, whilst down below there they are cutting each others throats? You did not mean that, surely, my dear fellow"

"Your idea is—?" said Delange, pointing with his finger.

"Exactly so! it is a charming spot, just between the two armies, and beneath the cloud of arrows, which is becoming more dense every moment. They will take the place of a tent or an awning, and will shield us from the sun."

"Of course they will. Upon my word, your idea is positively charming."

"You are a couple of fools," I exclaimed, thinking it high time to put my oar in. "The arrows will not go over your heads; they will take you in front and in rear."

"Then we shall be just like two animated pincushions," rejoined de Morin, laughing.

"That will be a joke," added Delange. "Come along, old fellow; I am with you."

I made one more effort to restrain the pair of lunatics.

"I should be the first to applaud and follow you if there were the least use in what you are going to do."

"Do you think," exclaimed de Morin, interrupting him, "that it is of no use to teach all these people that we are not afraid of them, and that we hold their arrows and lances in utter contempt? I suppose you would like them to say, when they get back to their country, 'In the hour of danger the white men ensconced themselves behind the banana trees and looked on whilst their allies fought and bled for them.' It is not only of use, but it is indispensably

necessary that we should stand high in the esteem of the Monbuttoos. It may be that the success of our enterprise depends on our line of conduct this very day."

"De Morin is right," said Delange. "In the first flush of success these people may make us pay dearly for our inaction and prudence."

"Then," said I, "if that is your opinion, I have nothing to do but go with you. I was present at the game you played under the shed; I will look on at the one you are going to play beneath the arrows."

"No, no," exclaimed de Morin; "you must stay with Madame de Guéran."

"Would you act on that piece of advice, my dear de Morin, if I were in your place and gave it to you?" I asked.

"I should take very good care to do nothing of the sort, my dear Périères," replied my rival.

"Then do not interfere with me. The battle is becoming more serious every moment. The Monbuttoos have some idea of strategy, and have nearly turned the enemy's flank. I do not think the fight will last much longer."

"I do not care," said de Morin, "so long as it gives us time for one game at écarté!"

"Only one?" asked Delange. "Kindly recollect that I owe you still eleven thousand francs; I have just consulted my book. Eleven thousand francs in five points is a little bit too much."

"Would you prefer a rubber?"

"Yes; a rubber, by all means. But," continued Delange, "a thought has just struck me. If I win, I shall not owe you anything."

"Certainly not, because we are going to play double or quits."

"In that case we shall not play any more to the end of the journey?" said the Doctor, in a tone of dismay.

"Make your mind easy," replied de Morin. "I will not be as cruel as all that. We have agreed to play for fifty louis every day, and we will go on doing so. If I am the loser in the end, so much the worse for me. The contract remains in full force, and this breaking through its provisions must be looked upon as an exceptional case."

"Then I have nothing more to say," rejoined Delange. "I was getting rather nervous, I admit, and I was thinking of making my way back to Paris alone. But as long as I can play cards every day, I am delighted with Africa."

Whilst this conversation was going on these two dear lunatics had advanced about three hundred yards towards the opposing forces, and I walked with them, watching the flight of arrows through the air, and listening to their hissing noise, now very plainly audible.

CHAPTER VI.

The war cries, shouts, and the groans of the wounded were also distinctly heard by us. The Domondoos express their sufferings by the cry *Aou! Aou!* or, if their agony is extreme, by *Akonn! Akonn!* The Monbuttoo expression, on the contrary, is *Nanegoué! Nanegoué!*

"You see, my dear Périères," said de Morin, "that we were quite right to leave the pit of the theatre and take our places in the stalls; we are gaining instruction. These cries teach us that every nation expresses suffering in a different way. The French people say—*Aie! Aïe! Oh! la! la!* The English call out—*Oh! oh! oh!* The Germans—*Och! och! och!* The Bungos—*Aah!* The Djours—*Aooay!* As for the Monbuttoos, you can hear what they say, and I am free to confess that the fools cry out loud enough."

"These remarks," chimed in Delange, who, even when he was joking, maintained his customary air of gravity, "are of immense interest to science, and we shall have deserved well of all the learned societies in the world. And to think that those miserable Parisians,

with easy consciences and minds at rest, are at this moment strolling on the beach at Dieppe and Trouville without giving a thought to the fact that they are ignorant of the cry of a Monbutto in pain!"

"Too true!" added de Morin. "They have not even a suspicion that such beings as the Monbuttoos exist."

"Is it possible? Poor creatures, how deeply they are to be pitied!"

We had reached the spot we intended to occupy—a little hillock, very conspicuous, without shelter of any kind, and equidistant from the troops of Munza and the hostile force. We seated ourselves on the grass, which at this precise place was not more than a foot high, and Delange, taking two packs of cards out of his pocket, said to de Morin—

"Let us cut for deal."

We were not exposed over-much to the sun, for, as my two companions had foreseen, the continuous flights of arrows from the two armies darkened the sky. It was slightly warm, and that was all.

The game commenced, and was played with the utmost seriousness. De Morin was, perhaps, less interested than his adversary, but as the stakes were rather high, and losing or winning them meant an entire change in the state of affairs, with a possibility of his no longer playing on velvet, as the saying goes, he was

tolerably careful in his play. As regards Delange, the prospect of at last getting rid of a debt which had for so long been tormenting him, and the idea that very soon he might be a creditor in his turn, raised his excitement to a very high pitch, though he played his best and was thoroughly self-possessed.

Whilst these two were absorbed in their game, I lay at full length on the grass and watched the progress of the fray. The Monbuttoos, seeing us advancing towards the field of battle, naturally thought we were going to help them, and received us with uproarious shouts. But, when they saw us come to a halt, sit down, take little pictures out of our pockets, and shuffle them in our hands, they were dumbfounded. Munza alone, perhaps, was capable of appreciating our idea; he understood, as we found out later on, that, though we were determined not to fight, we did not intend to shirk our share of danger. However, if the motive by which we were actuated escaped the mass of the people, they recognized the one fact before their eyes—in the situation occupied by us, of our own free will, we were exposed to the missiles of both armies. Instinctively they admired our courage and coolness, and as soon as they saw that the arrows did not hit us, they thought we were invulnerable, and we must have risen proportionately in their esteem.

The Domondoos, on their side, were alarmed

by the sudden apparition of three white men, clothed in a strange garb, and advancing quietly in the open. If they had been gifted with any religious feeling, they might have taken us for celestial beings, a trio of angels descended from the clouds, to watch over the struggles of man. But, without having such an exalted opinion of us, they, possibly, imagined that we had come up from below to protect them. When they perceived that, instead of spreading our wings over their army, we were simply minding our own business—lying down on the grass, and turning our backs upon them, they were excessively dissatisfied, and set to work to insult us. Some of them indulged in threatening gestures, others, shouting their war cry, and bounding from one side to the other, as if they were taking part in a pantomime, came close up to us and assailed us with volleys of invective.

A flight of arrows, winged, no doubt, by Munza's orders, compelled them to retire, and from that moment we heard nothing but the whizzing of the shafts, and the unceasing din of the battle.

"One game to me," said Delange.

"So much the better," replied de Morin. "I shall win the second, and then we can play the conqueror."

"Pending which, I mark the king," rejoined the doctor.

"Mark away, but excuse me for one moment

whilst I glance at this arrow which just missed my back."

He put out his hand and, without getting up, pulled the impertinent missile out of the ground.

"Look," continued de Morin, turning to me, "the shaft is feathered with the leaves of the banana tree."

"To increase its velocity," remarked Delange, as he shuffled the cards. "Is the point iron or wood?"

"Iron."

"That is bad; I do not like that, the wound is so much more difficult to cure."

"See," said de Morin, handing the arrow to the doctor. "It seems as if the point were smeared with some gummy substance."

"So it is, my dear fellow; there is no doubt about that, any more than that the substance is poison."

"Poison? Brr! as Munza says, that sounds nasty."

"Don't be uneasy," replied the doctor. "If you are wounded by one of these engines of war, I will wash the wound with a preparation I have, and you may, possibly, get over it. Cards?"

"No, thanks. I play."

The arrows whizzed by incessantly in a perfect deluge, and as I saw numbers of them falling all around us, I could not help thinking

of the description given by Schweinfurth of his fight with the Niam-Niam, where he says that "the storm of arrows which they hurled against us as we advanced fell like strays from a waggon-load of straw."

At the same time the war cries, the yelling, the groans of the wounded and dying, the braying of trumpets, and rolling of drums, were mingled in one confused, deafening din, slightly trying to the nerves of peaceable écarté players.

Suddenly, at the very height of the uproar, profound silence fell on the host of the Monbuttoos, whilst cries of joy and triumph might be heard from the ranks of the hostile army. Something serious had evidently happened. I took up my telescope, steadied it on the shoulder of the doctor, who, more and more absorbed in his game, did not even know that I was using him as a rest, and looked towards the Monbuttoos.

"Munza is wounded!" I exclaimed.

"Ah!" said de Morin.

"Ah!" echoed Delange. "I score one. We are four all."

"Are you not going to offer your services to the wounded man?" I asked.

"Certainly; that is my intention. I know my duty. But on the cards which de Morin is dealing hangs my fate. If they are good, I shall win the second game, and, consequently,

the rubber. Munza will not die from the momentary delay."

He took the five cards which his adversary had just laid tenderly on the grass, looked at him, and said—

"I play."

"Play," said de Morin, with a smile, as if he were sure of the game.

For a moment I forgot all about the King of the Monbuttoos in my interest in his hand, which might possibly be a decisive one. It was not so. De Morin, thanks to a wretched little trump, made the third trick and went out. They were consequently game and game, and had to play the conqueror.

"I must go and attend to the King's wound," said the doctor, laying hold of his instrument case, which he had taken care to bring with him.

"Shall I come with you?" asked de Morin.

"There is no necessity for that," replied Delange, as he went away. "I shall be back directly. Take care of the cards, whatever you do, and keep them out of harm's way."

"I will cover them with my body!" exclaimed de Morin.

The doctor, in a hurry to get back and finish the rubber, strode along rapidly towards the Monbuttoos. I went after him, thinking that I might be of some use, and, as I felt sure that nobody would ask me to show my commission or diploma, I at once conferred upon

myself the rank of staff-surgeon of the second class.

Munza's officers, when they saw Delange, the white sorcerer, as they called him, coming towards them, ran to meet him and brought him to the spot where their leader lay, to the great dismay of the official sorcerers, whose position we were, without any ceremony, going to usurp. The King was resting on a shield and, in marked contrast to his followers, who were indulging in an incessant chorus of *Nanegoué! Nanegoué!* allowed no sign of suffering to escape him. He welcomed Delange with a smile, and made a sign with his hand that everybody else should withdraw.

The doctor stooped down and found that the King was suffering from an arrow wound in the thigh. The iron head was still in the wound, none of the negro sorcerers having even attempted to extract it. This operation, as a rule, is not a very difficult one; they seize the shaft of the arrow with both hands, and tug away until it chooses to come out. But by a very ingenious device, the Domondoos manufacture their missiles in such a way that they break at the moment of impact, the head remaining in the wound, and the shaft falling to the ground. The operator has, therefore nothing to catch hold of, and when that functionary happens to be a negro sorcerer, he howls, tears his hair, and does nothing else.

Delange, without a moment's hesitation, opened his case, and, taking out one of those horrible little instruments which always cause a shudder, proceeded to make a large incision in the royal thigh, and with his forceps extracted the iron barb. This operation was performed without a sound from Munza, and the doctor then washed the wound, stanched the blood, bound up the thigh, examined the general state of his patient, put his implements of torture back into their case, shook the hand held out to him by the wounded man in token of gratitude, and made his way back again through the midst of the army.

He had done this all himself, like photograpers do, and, no doubt jealous of me, had not even condescended to give me the lint to hold. Nevertheless, I thought I might as well go back with him, and in a few moments we had rejoined de Morin, who, during our absence, had been amusing himself by making a collection of the arrows which were falling around him, and had already possessed himself of a decent-sized bundle.

"Now for the conqueror," said the doctor, as he took his place opposite his adversary.

CHAPTER VII.

The spot was no longer tenable by the écarté players; the arrows fell faster and faster, and in ever increasing quantities. De Morin would have had several in his back, if the havresack, which he carried about with him, had not acted as a cuirass. Three arrows had stuck in it, but their onward progress had been arrested by the various articles in the bag, and so the wearer escaped.

"A hit!" said de Morin, each time he felt an arrow strike his havresack. "With all these points, to all appearances sticking out of my body, I shall end by being taken for a porcupine."

"Yes," remarked Delange, "these fools are beginning to show some signs of skill, and I see the moment fast approaching when I shall have to operate on myself, as I have already done on Munza, and that, I assure you, is not exactly the sort of amusement I should choose."

The Domondoos certainly deserved the epithet fools just conferred on them by the Doctor; instead of following up their momentary success, consequent on Munza being

wounded, and taking advantage of the panic thus created amongst their enemies, instead of attacking the opposing force with greater vigour than before, charging home, and, possibly, routing it entirely, they began to dance, and sing, and shout, making us the targets of their arrows. It might have been supposed that we three represented Munza's troops, and that if we were exterminated, the whole army would disappear.

But the King was watching over us, and as soon as he saw we were bent on staying where we were, he did his best to render the spot less dangerous by fortifying it in a measure. By his order, a score of soldiers came to our assistance, with a lot of wooden shields, of which they made a sort of palisading behind us; they themselves then extended to the right and left of us, and, by raising and lowering their other shields as the too intrusive arrows flew towards us, they protected us on every side. We were, consequently, in perfect safety, sheltered not only from the arrows, but also from the sun's rays, and the two gamblers were loud in their praises of Munza.

"Nothing could be more ingenious," remarked de Morin. "Thanks to that excellent man, we can continue our game in peace and quietness. Ah! I score a vole."

"Too true, by Jove! There is no disputing that."

The doctor did not score a vole, but, in his next hand, he marked the king, and made the point, which came to the same thing. The two adversaries were two all, and a few moments more would settle the question.

The idea of the palisade was really a very happy one; the short, sharp sounds made by the iron arrowheads, as they struck against the shields, told us that our enemies were continuing their trial of skill at us.

"It might be hailing," observed de Morin.

"I do not know whether it hails or not, my dear fellow," replied Delange, "but I do know that I have made a point, so that I am three to your two."

"So I see; but you need not be so ungenerous as to boast about it."

A Monbuttoo soldier, attending to the game, instead of to his business, let an arrow pass him.

"Look out, clumsy!" exclaimed de Morin. "If I lose, I will have it out of you to the tune of a few thousand francs."

The black burst out laughing, as if he quite saw the joke.

The deal was now with Delange, who turned up the ace of hearts. De Morin looked at his hand, and, without asking for cards, played the king of spades.

An almost imperceptible smile played round the doctor's lips. He took the king with a small

trump, played the queen of hearts, which, of course, was the best card, and timidly put down the knave of diamonds. As his adversary had a lower card of the same suit, this gave Delange three tricks out of the five.

He looked at de Morin, and said—

"I score two, if you have no objection, seeing that you chose not to ask for cards. Three and two make five, all over the world, Africa included, and, consequently, the rubber is mine."

"By the skin of your teeth," said de Morin, as he got up.

"Do not grudge me my triumph," replied Delange. "We are now quits, and I feel as if I had escaped a great danger."

"I can quite imagine it—you have escaped ninety thousand francs."

"If we could only escape back again to France," I chimed in. "It is high time we did so, I fear."

"You are right," said de Morin. "That small detail had escaped me. This gambling saloon, constructed by Munza, is so pleasant and comfortable, that I thought I was at the club."

"Don't you think," I continued, "that the battle is becoming monotonous? would it not be as well to interfere?"

"Yes, I do; but how are we to set about it?"

"Let us authorise our Nubians to join in the fray. Look at them down below there; they are boiling over with impatience, and cannot leave their rifles alone. If Nassar had not been there to restrain them, they would have opened fire long ago."

"Their fire would not finish the business; their rifles are only loaded with blank cartridge."

"Are you sorry for that?" asked de Morin.

"Well, considering that the Domondoos have presented us with a plentiful stock of arrows, I think we ought to give them a few bullets in return."

"Nonsense," replied de Morin. "Let us keep our ammunition for a better purpose. Blank cartridge will do well enough here."

He stepped outside our palisade, and contrived, by dint of frantic gesticulations, to let Nassar know that he required the attendance of our escort. They were only too ready to obey, and Nassar was at once despatched to the King with a request that we might be furnished with a hundred of his crack shots. As soon as they reached us, de Morin made them form up in a double line, and told them not to let fly their arrows until he gave the word. At the same time, our soldiers were instructed to reserve their fire until the arrows sped on their way.

Delange and I saw our friend's drift at once;

the report of our arms would spread terror amongst the Domondoos, whilst the arrows, from the short range, would make immediate havoc in their ranks. By this combination, the Nubians, seeing their adversaries fall, would labour under the delusion that they had killed or wounded them, and would never perceive that their cartridges were destitute of bullets. The enemy, terrified by the noise, would equally think that they were hit by us. Our consciences would, in this way, be quite clear; our rifles would have done no harm, and in a few moments we should put an end to a struggle which could not fail to be more bloody the longer it lasted.

At a signal from de Morin, away flew the arrows, and a simultaneous report of fire-arms was heard.

The Domondoos were completely routed; some ran in terror across the plain, others sought a refuge in the tall grass, whilst very many were so paralyzed by fright that they lay down flat on their faces, or went on their knees and held out their arms to implore our pity. We should have been well pleased to pardon them, and we would have given much to have been able to tell them to lay down their arms, and return in peace to their homes. But how were we to stop Munza's army, how could we prevent his people pursuing the fugitives, making some prisoners, and killing the remainder?

We contrived, nevertheless, to save a portion of our foes by giving them time to save themselves. By our orders, and still under the impression that they were doing wonders, the Nubians continued their fire, and the Monbuttoos, quite as much frightened as their enemies were by the noise, dared not set off in pursuit. Posted between the two armies, we thus managed, for a short time, to set up a kind of barrier between the victors and the vanquished. But our soldiers, as I have already said, had only ten rounds each, and these were soon expended.

The plain thus became the scene of a horrible *mêlée;* lances, axes, knives and teeth took the place of arrows. Hand to hand they fought, and bled, and bit, and ate. It was a sight worthy of the infernal regions, a loathsome, revolting spectacle. In one place a group of soldiers might be seen to suddenly cease to fight, and take to dancing round their victims; some would seize on a corpse and cut the flesh to ribands, and others, for the purpose of rendering themselves invulnerable, as Munza had told us, would hack the bodies of their foes to get at the fat. All these scenes were revolting to a degree, but we should have been wrong in shrinking from them and giving way to our feelings of disgust. On the contrary, we rushed from group to group, intent on rescuing some

victims, at all events, from the knives of their butchers.

Munza did his best to help us. At the urgent entreaty of Madame de Guéran, who, accompanied by the Arab interpreters, had courageously made her way to the King, he gave orders for the massacre to cease, telling his men to give quarter and make prisoners only. He himself saw that his orders were obeyed; preceded by his musicians, and borne on a shield by six runners, he went all over the battle field as we were doing. As for the prisoners, we obtained permission to place our Nubians on guard over them, together with the Monbuttoos. By this time we had served out ball cartridge to our men, and we knew well that they would not allow the prisoners to be beheaded, so long as they were there to prevent it, the tribes to which they belong having a superstitious horror of decapitation.

We had thus done our very best to mitigate the horrors of this annual massacre, in no way provoked by our presence amongst the Monbuttoos. But, when evening arrived, we were powerless to prevent fire and plunder. A large village was situated hard by the field of battle, and it was to protect the place that the Domondoos had massed their forces in the plain. Munza's troops, when the battle was over, rushed headlong into this important hamlet,

and, after having sacked the huts, set fire to them.

Delange, de Morin and I followed close upon their heels, in the hope of saving the aged, the children and such sick people as might have been left to their fate in the huts. We succeeded, indeed, in taking a few under our protection, and we were just about to withdraw with them and rescue them from the flames, when piercing shrieks fell upon our ears.

They proceeded from a hut not yet attacked by the flames. I was the first to enter, and I found a poor, sick man who, unable to get out, was calling for assistance, to save himself from being burnt alive. Just as I was taking him up in my arms, the lurid glare of the flames lit up the interior of the hut, and a species of placard, suspended from the wall, caught my eye.

I went up to it. On a large sheet of paper, evidently torn out of a book, were about a hundred lines of writing, and underneath them we read, in large letters, this signature—Baron de Guéran.

CHAPTER VIII.

De Morin and Delange joined me, and assisted me in providing for the safety of the inhabitant of the hut. We entrusted him, as well as the other unfortunates rescued by us, to Nassar, and then made the best of our way back to our camp. Madame de Guéran was on the look out for us, and, after explaining to her in a few words what had taken place, I handed her the sheet of paper with the small, close handwriting of her husband.

She took it, glanced at it, and handed it back to me, saying, in a broken voice—

"I cannot read it; read it for me, and aloud, for I have no secrets from any of you."

By the light of the flames, which had enveloped the entire Domondoo village, had attacked the neighbouring woods, and were extinguished only about a hundred yards from where we were, I contrived to decipher this precious document.

I copy it word for word in the journal of the Expedition—

"How long have I lingered through my enduring agony? Am I in the middle or at the

end of 1872? I cannot answer that question precisely.

"If I look around me, the cloudless, deep blue sky, the warm colouring of the trees, the masses of red which overtop the tall grass, and the haze rising from the parched ground and spreading upwards like a cloud in the horizon, all tell me that the dry season has returned.

"My illness, my long lethargy, must therefore have lasted for four months at the very least! Indeed, I remember having been still in possession of my senses during the rainy season; I can recollect the beginning of July, but from that time all is a blank.

"I must needs consult Nature's page. Who can tell me, if she cannot, anything about the time that has escaped me? I am alone—long, very long ago my interpreters and all my servants were massacred before my eyes. As for my soldiers and bearers, some are dead, and the rest, more fortunate than I, fled away.

"Alone—yes, I am alone, and so far from my country, so far from those I love, so far from her!

"How I have been punished for having left you, my loved companion! for having preferred the novelty and excitement of distant travel to the calm joy of our dear fireside; for having dared to let my love of science outweigh my love for you! You deem me at this moment

dead, and are weeping for me. You may, indeed, weep for me; I live still, but I am so weak, so utterly destitute of resources, and so disheartened, that I shall not go much farther; you may wear mourning for me; it is only a little premature.

"But I will not die without having said good-bye to you. I will tear this page out of my note-book, I will fasten it to the partition of my hut, and I will try to impress upon the unfortunate invalid who inhabits it, the only being who, in this country, has shown me one grain of pity, that this piece of paper is a fetish able to protect him. He will never tear it down, and some day, perhaps, other travellers, following the same route that I have done, will find these lines and take them back to my country.

"What has happened to me?—If my enfeebled memory would only come back to my assistance! Let me try.

"I made a great mistake in allowing Degberra's soldiers to enter the territory of the Domondoos. I very soon succeeded, as I had always intended to do, in getting rid of my compromising escort, and in alarming them to such a degree that they were glad to make the best of their way to their own country. But the Domondoos had recognised their mortal enemies in the midst of my caravan, the men who, every year, plunder them, kill them, and

carry them away into captivity. I and my people were destined to bear their vengeance on the Monbuttoos.

"Day after day they attacked us, harassed us with their arrows, and killed some of my men. Then we fell into an ambush, and, in spite of our determined resistance, we were overwhelmed by numbers. They seized upon everything I possessed, baggage, provisions, and arms; my ammunition they could not take, for it was exhausted, and for a long time we had been fighting with side-arms. With ten rifles I could have routed the whole tribe!

"Instead of vanquishing them, I am become their slave, the slave of a tribe of wild beasts! The Monbuttoos are right in stigmatising them with the degrading title, the *Momvoos*. The Monbuttoos! They are the refinement of civilisation compared with this tribe. The wretches have but one merit; they are not cannibals. On this side of Africa, cannibalism appears to cease on their frontier. But if they do not eat their prisoners, they make them suffer horribly, and I almost think they would display more humanity if they did eat them!

"One day, worn out by privation and fatigue, tortured in mind and body, broken down and utterly overcome, I fell in one of the streets of the village, and I did not get up again.

"What happened then I know not, and never shall know. They, no doubt, thought I was

dead; I must have been thrown aside in some corner, where, later on, I was picked up and brought here. What was the nature of my illness? Sunstroke, I imagine, or malignant typhoid fever. Who looked after me? Nobody —I only remember a negro, a poor invalid, the sole inhabitant of the hut, dragging himself occasionally to my side, and putting to my lips a gourd filled with a beverage of his own brewing. How came an angel of mercy into this Domondoo hell? I owe him my life, and I cannot show him my gratitude. May God reward him; may He watch over the awakening of this benighted soul, and bring it to the full knowledge of Himself!

"Afterwards, long afterwards, I was able to open my eyes, and look around me; I felt that I still lived, and that was all—I could neither move, speak, nor think.

"By degrees my strength came back to me, and my host gave me now and then a banana or a little flour mixed with water. My weakness diminished, and I was once more becoming master of myself. In about ten days from this time I was able to walk about the hut, but my saviour made me understand that I must not cross the threshold. His countrymen thought me dead, and, thanks to this mistake, I might be able to escape during the night.

"Escape! Where can I go in my present state? Return to Degberra? It is too far,

and I should have to pass through the country of the Domondoos; I should be recaptured, I should be their prisoner once more! No! no! I have suffered outrage and torture enough! And, besides, how should I be received by the despot whom I have misled, who has been deceived in his expectations?

"I have but one course before me; to gain the frontier of the Maleggas, a few miles only distant from this spot. That tribe, according to what I have been told, is more humane than the Domondoos; they will, perhaps, let me regain my strength in their country, recover my health, and, later on, continue my journey.

"My journey! As if I could think even of carrying out my project—as if, in my state of weakness and destitution, I could dream of filling up the blank between the discoveries of Schweinfurth and those of Speke and Grant!

"And yet—hope has not abandoned me altogether. I cannot have undergone all these perils to die now. It cannot be that, after having achieved so much, I am destined to leave my task unfinished. My terrible past is, in itself, a guarantee for my future.

"I will escape to-night! I will drag myself to the neighbouring frontier. May God have mercy on me, and be gracious to those who read these lines!"

As soon as I had finished reading I looked at

Madame de Guéran. Her face was bathed in tears.

We were going discreetly to withdraw, when, drying her tears and mastering her emotion, she made a sign to beg us not to leave her, and as soon as she had thoroughly recovered her self-possession, she said—

"Is the negro of whom my husband speaks alive? Can we find him?"

"Certainly," I replied. "He is close to us, with our people. We were fortunate enough to save him and snatch him from the flames."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, holding out the paper I had handed back to her, "my husband was not mistaken! These lines have served as a talisman to this poor creature! I want to see him. I want to question him. Perhaps he can tell us more—perhaps—"

She stopped. We divined her unspoken thought.

"You had better let us question this man," said de Morin. "We will repeat to you every word he says, but if there should be bad news, we might break it to you less brusquely, less unfeelingly—"

"Be it so! Go, and I will wait for you here."

We found Nassar keeping watch and ward over our personal prisoners, *protegés* would be the better word, and he brought us to the man

who interested us so deeply. The poor wretch was awake, his fears preventing him from sleeping; it appeared to him impossible that he should have been rescued from the flames and made a prisoner without being destined to be eaten. The Monbuttoos enjoyed an unenviable reputation, and he tarred us with the same brush.

Nassar succeeded in explaining to him that, so far from wishing to do him harm, we were bent upon doing everything we could for him, and as soon as he had reassured him on this point, he questioned him about the white man, his guest for so long a time.

"What has become of him?" asked our interpreter. "Has he reached the frontier of the Maleggas?"

The negro considered for some time; the terrible fright he had just undergone had almost deprived him of the little memory he possessed. At length he gave us to understand that the white man had never reappeared.

"But," persisted the interpreter, "did he die before reaching the neighbouring tribe?"

"No," replied the sick man, "he arrived there, and, some time afterwards, sent me, as a present, an ox given to him by the King of that tribe."

We had this answer repeated and translated twice, as it appeared to us to be of the utmost importance. It, indeed, established the fact

that not only had M. de Guéran been able to escape from his enemies and continue his journey, but that he had been received kindly by the Maleggas.

"And you have never heard of him since?" asked Nassar.

"Never," was the reply.

"Well," said de Morin, as we made our way back to the spot where we had left Madame de Guéran, "I begin to think that, one day or other, we shall stumble across this dear Baron."

"Yes," I replied, "the chances are in favour of it."

"So I think. But has it occurred to you that in proportion as those chances increase, ours diminish?"

"Clearly. How does that affect you?"

"How does it affect you?"

"My dear fellow," said de Morin to me, "it is very odd, but all the same it is a fact that I have ended by sharing the hopes, fears, doubts, and sufferings of our companion. I appear now to have a direct interest in finding her husband, whereas you might naturally suppose that all my interest would be centred in never setting eyes on him. In short, this charming woman has gained such a hold over me, and I esteem her so highly, that every now and then I am surprised at finding my own identity merged in hers, and my thoughts devoted to her happiness alone."

"That is precisely my feeling," I replied. "Only, I wish she would feel that to bring about my happiness would conduce to her own."

This philosophical dissertation was interrupted by the subject of it. She came to meet us as soon as she caught sight of us, and at once asked for our report. De Morin must have been right, for I experienced a real pleasure in imparting to her the good news we had just heard.

The night was far advanced when we separated, after having decided upon the line of conduct we were to pursue on the morrow.

CHAPTER IX.

About an hour after sunrise Doctor Delange commenced his round of visits. The wounded had, indeed, every need of his skilful ministrations. De Morin and I went with him, as medical students or hospital orderlies. Less presumptuous than on the previous day, I had resigned my position as assistant-surgeon.

"I do not intend," said Delange, as we walked along, "to depart from my Parisian habits. When I was a surgeon at Lariboisière, I always began my rounds with the hospital, leaving my rich patients to wait until I had finished there. So I am going to begin with the prisoners, and shall attend to those who were wounded yesterday before I do anything to the royal thigh. Does that suit you?"

"Perfectly," I replied. "We shall, in all probability, have a long conversation with Munza, and the other invalids might grow impatient."

The prisoners had been turned into a large enclosure, surrounded by a palisade; quite naked, and huddled together like a flock of sheep brought to the shambles, they awaited, with resignation, the arrival of the butchers.

Thanks to the precautions we had taken, no harm had come to any of them.

Delange dressed their wounds, set a few dislocated limbs, and very skilfully extracted such arrow-heads as had been thoughtless enough to remain embedded in the flesh. Did his patients appreciate these attentions? Did they take him for a surgeon or a cook? To reply to these questions, the doctor betook himself to the study of a few heads. Alas! after examination made, he confessed that the gorilla and the chimpanzee appeared to him superior to the Domondoos, from an intellectual point of view. Nevertheless, as regards the structure of the body, we have come to the conclusion that the nearer we approach to the equator, the more perfect becomes the human form. The Niam-Niam have the advantage of the Bongos, and are in turn surpassed by the Monbuttoos, whilst the Domondoos are in advance of both.

"We are evidently drawing near," said Delange, "to that famous tribe of which we have heard so much. At last we shall see the dusky Venus of my dreams."

Munza appeared very grateful to the doctor for the visit. His ordinary attendants would never have succeeded in extracting the arrow-head which had wounded him, and, without Delange, he would have suffered horribly, even if he had not died from the poison. He submitted, therefore, with the best possible grace

to a fresh dressing, which made him lend a willing ear to what we had to say.

Nassar recounted to him the incident of the previous evening, and gave him a *resumé* of M. de Guéran's letter. One point, which seemed to us of but little importance, struck him at once.

"The Domondoos ill-treated your father," said he, "and you, doubtless, are eager for revenge. Take two thousand of my prisoners and kill them without mercy; I give them to you."

We replied that white men never thought of revenge, but did good, even to their enemies. Munza was silent for a moment; in spite of all his efforts, he could not understand us.

"Then," he said, at last, addressing Delange, "you did not come to my assistance yesterday, and cure my wound, because I am your friend?"

"I came to you because you were in pain," replied the Doctor. "I try to cure all those who suffer."

The King was silent once more for an instant, and then he murmured a few words, which meant, "these white men are very strange!"

A species of slow, but progressive, revolution was taking place in the mind of this barbarian. He was still far from understanding or sharing in our ideas, but they attracted his attention, and he endeavoured to make a note of them, ponder over them, and compare them with his own. He was living with us

in a new world, one which he instinctively admired.

"And so," he resumed presently, "you do not want me to give you my prisoners?"

"On the contrary," said de Morin. "But if you do we shall set them at liberty."

"That is impossible;" replied Munza, as soon as the words were translated for him; "my soldiers would mutiny. Whatever we capture from the enemy, belongs to them equally with myself."

"Give us, then, your share of the booty," said I, boldly.

"Yes, I will give that to your sister," replied the King.

"In her name we thank you, and we will release the women, the children, and the wounded."

"Be it so! What is done," he asked, after another pause, "in your country with the prisoners?"

"We keep them in custody for a certain time," replied de Morin, "to prevent them fighting against us. As soon as the war is over, we send them back to their own country."

"Where do you keep them?"

"In our towns. The officers can even walk about, as they are free on parole."

Nassar could not translate this last expression, and we were compelled to make use of a paraphrase to convey our meaning.

"And is that sufficient?" said Munza.

"The white man never lies," replied de Morin, imprudently.

"Ah!" exclaimed the King. "Then tell me if you think your sister will return to my kingdom and marry me?"

De Morin had made the mistake, and on him fell the responsibility of repairing it.

"She will certainly return," said he, "if we find our father, and he allows her to marry you."

"Do you think he will?"

"I do not know, and I cannot say. To make a statement, without being sure about its truth, is to tell a lie, and I have already said that we never lie."

A lengthy silence ensued.

"You wish, therefore," resumed Munza, "to visit the people you call Maleggas, and we Maogoos? I can take you there without any fighting, for the King, Kadjoro, is my ally. But suppose your father has left his kingdom?"

"We must go on."

"I cannot go so far away from my country."

"Not even to win our sister?"

"If I were only sure of winning her I would give up my kingdom!"

Nassar was not under the necessity of interpreting this last sentence, such expression was there in Munza's look, action and voice.

It was agreed that the King of the Mon-

buttoos should give due notice to his ally of his speedy arrival, and that the army should continue its march towards the south. The prisoners were to be despatched to Degberra, but the soldiers sent with them were forbidden, on pain of death, to maltreat them.

"Munza is decidedly becoming more and more civilised," said Delange, as we were going back to our camp. "Love works wonders. But is there not something in the conduct of this savage quite contrary to reason? Nobody will believe our account of this part of our expedition. I think I hear the Club wits say—'Get along with you! You are making fun of us! Instead of making love to Madame de Guéran in the orthodox fashion, and setting about the discovery of her *soi-disant* father, an African monarch would have killed or poisoned you off-hand. And when he had got rid of his trio of bores, he would have shut the Baroness up in his palace, without giving her the option of saying yes or no.'"

"The ignorant and fools would, doubtless, say so, my dear Delange," replied de Morin, "and their saying so would simply prove that they knew nothing whatever of the credulous, unsophisticated character of the negro, and that they utterly ignored the marvellous *prestige* attaching to white men amongst the African tribes. Men of intelligence would take the trouble of reflecting, and would say to

themselves that the stronger and more numerous have not always the courage to attack their weaker brethren. Here the colour of the skin goes for something; in Europe, rank and education fill the same *rôle*. Take a regiment, for instance. Send it on a campaign by itself, free from all control, and fearless of consequences. The rank and file muster two thousand, and the officers, perhaps, twenty, but those twenty men, even with sheathed swords, can do what they like with that, comparatively speaking, vast army of rifles. Materially, Munza cannot fear us; morally, without knowing it, he trembles before us."

"In that case," said I to de Morin, "we shall never have to fight the King and his army?"

"I never said so. The moment he sees that we do not intend to return to his dominions, and to surrender Madame de Guéran to him, he may become terrible. The influence we exercise over him at this present time will vanish before his passions. The savage will once more resume his rights, and in that case I would not give much for our three lives. But, my dear fellow, we must be guided, as we have ever been, by events. If we only take proper precautions before undertaking anything, Paris may yet have the honour of claiming us once more as her own."

In the afternoon, some of Munza's officers

came to ask us to choose our prisoners. Without standing on any ceremony, we released a goodly number—that is to say, we allowed M. de Guéran's host to release them. He selected his friends, and they were at once turned out of the enclosure. He thus, very cheaply, acquired a great reputation in his own country, and was speedily recognised as a sorcerer, which elevated him to the ranks of the nobility. The Baron's debt was discharged.

CHAPTER X.

We might very well suppose that Africa, flattered at receiving a visit from Europeans, is bent upon preparing a fresh surprise for us every day, and wishes to astonish us by the variety of her landscapes and manners. The soil, and they who inhabit it, present a fresh aspect every moment, so that the eye is never wearied, curiosity is always aroused, and one's imagination is incessantly active.

Yesterday, we met with a race of dwarfs, the Akkas; to-day we find ourselves amongst the Maleggas, men of commanding stature, and admirably-proportioned limbs, with frank, open countenances, fine eyes, well-shaped mouths, and complexions of bronze. Yesterday we were fighting against the Domondoos, a set of cowardly, cruel brutes; to-day we have been received with open arms by a hospitable, brave, and almost intellectual people.

The natives, amongst whom we have sojourned during the past few months, have never been able to make up their minds to cultivate the ground, although the soil requires so little labour, and repays the slightest atten-

tion. They reap the harvest before it is ripe, gather the fruit whilst it is still green, and in every conceivable way display their ingratitude towards the paradise where accident has made them see the light. If they become tired of the vegetables and fruit which Nature places ready to their hands, if the manna which falls from heaven does not suffice them, and if they hanker after more substantial food, they betake themselves to plundering their neighbours, "lifting" their cattle, and growing fat at their expense.

For the last few days, on the other hand, we have been passing through a vast territory in a state of perfect cultivation, whose inhabitants are self-dependent. Oxen form the wealth of the country, and every hamlet possesses a large quantity of them. They roam at will through the extensive pasture-grounds watered by numerous streams converging towards the Keebally. This constant supply of water renders the plains as green, even in summer, as they are in the height of the rainy season. Vast forests encircle them and shelter them from the sun's rays, and where the plain is of too great an extent to be effectually shaded by the surrounding woods, trees scattered here and there prevent all possibility of its being parched and dried up. Here one sees a tamarind tree, eighty feet in diameter, and forming a perfect bower; there a baobab, with a circumference of twenty yards.

Such of the cattle as are not allowed to roam about, are herded in large kraals surrounded by palisades and guarded by herdsmen, who keep large fires burning to protect them from the flies and mosquitoes. We are in the midst of a mild-mannered race of shepherds, who fight in self-defence alone, when their wealth provokes the cupidity of their neighbours. As a measure of precaution, sentries continually patrol round the kraals and villages, and the war-drum is ever in readiness to summon the tribe to arms. As if to assert that they are neither invaders nor oppressors, but confine themselves to protecting their native land, their dwellings and their families, the Maleggas do not possess any weapon of attack. They replace the bow and arrow by a long-bladed knife, and a formidable iron-headed club.

These people defend themselves valiantly, and their neighbours are so well aware of it that they hesitate to attack them. In other respects the Maleggas show themselves friendly-disposed towards the bordering tribes, and, in order to enjoy the blessings of peace, and herd their cattle in ease and tranquillity, they pay tribute to those whose strength they fear. They never trouble their heads about the Domondoos, their northern neighbours, because the Monbuttoos, as we have already seen, make it their business to bring that nation to reason once a year, and carry all its able-bodied men into slavery.

Amongst this tribe, out of place in the heart of Africa, planted, apparently, by God, to be an example to their neighbours—an example, by-the-way, by which those neighbours do not profit in the least—we ought very easily to obtain the information we seek.

If accident had not placed in our hands the notes written by M. de Guéran, we should not have learnt a single thing from the Domondoos, who were incapable even of understanding our interpreters and replying to them. But here, with the knowledge we have already gained of the negro dialects, which are very various, but always, to a certain extent, analogous, we can often manage to convey our own meaning, and grasp the sense, at all events, of what is said to us. The vocabularies of these tribes are not so voluminous as our own; a few simple words and certain expressions, adopted into common usage, form the foundation of the language. By degrees, one gets to understand these, and any verbal deficiencies are made up advantageously by a look or a gesture.

These interviews were not always easily arranged, because in the first districts we passed through, our arrival produced great consternation. King Kadjoro, however, lost no time in assuring his subjects that they had nothing to fear from the Monbuttoos, and Munza, at the same time, maintained strict discipline in his army, having secured that

desirable end by the summary execution of a few thieves and marauders.

In spite of these delicate attentions on the part of Munza, and the remonstrances of their own King, the peaceable Maleggas in the first instance took to flight at the very approach of our noisy and always unruly army. But by degrees, when the soldiers had constructed their camp, and it was seen that they laid aside their arms and lolled about quietly in the shade, the natives returned to their homes, and frequently came to our side of the encampment.

Without being almost entirely clothed, as the Monbuttoos are, the Maleggas wear a species of drawers made out of cow-hide, which renders them presentable. This is supplemented by tattooing, in their case very complicated, composed of curved and straight lines crossing each other, with zigzags and circles intermixed. The women, following the example of their sisters in other tribes, wear a costume of leaves, and are not sparing of the material, which is always of considerable dimensions. Near the equator, Nature is liberal with her foliage, and the Malegga ladies take advantage of her generosity to give amplitude to their garments.

It was not long before we were surrounded by curious, but not offensively inquisitive groups. We, on our side, scanned the crowd attentively, so as to single out the man or woman whose appearance held out the greatest

promise of intelligence. When we hit upon a likely subject, we called him or her, as the case might be, to come to us. The individual thus distinguished would hesitate at first, and show signs of retreating, but urged on by his comrades he would end by waddling awkwardly towards us.

The examination would then commence, M. de Guéran, of course, being the sole topic. Here we learnt that he stayed in the neighbouring village for nearly a fortnight. He appeared, so we were told, tired and ill, and dragged himself along rather than walked. They showed us the hut where he had rested, and whence, as soon as he felt himself strong enough, he had set out towards the south. We were thus following our fellow-countryman, step by step. We saw him, as it were, recovering his strength, and making longer and longer stages on his journey. The hospitality of the Maleggas hastened his recovery ; in the villages on the frontier he was still an invalid, staggering along ; in the hamlets in the centre of the country he was a man again, stronger and more vigorous. He walked and did not merely crawl.

His portrait never varies, but seems graven on the memory of the whole tribe. Those who never saw him have heard him spoken of so often that they know him and can depict his appearance. The journey of this stranger

through the country has been a regular event, and the recollection of it is even now far from dying out.

Everybody is agreed on the point that he had a long fair beard, and flowing locks. This latter detail was at first a surprise to the Baroness, who only knew her husband as with a pair of moustaches and short hair, but it soon dawned upon her that M. de Guéran, robbed by the Domondoos of all his baggage, must have been obliged to submit to the growth of that which he could neither cut nor shave. Besides, travellers in central Africa, even those who have not been robbed, as the Baron was, do not take very great pains with their toilet, and we are exceptionally favoured in this respect, thanks to Joseph, who at the commencement of our journey was appointed to the rank of sole barber to the expedition. It also very frequently happens that Europeans end by drawing near to the Africans in the matter of complexion, the fair ones becoming coffee-coloured, and the dark ones chocolate. The skin peels under the influence of the sun's burning rays, one becomes unrecognizable and might very easily pass muster, if not amongst regular negroes, at all events amongst many tribes of a less dusky hue. M. de Guéran appears to have saved from the wreck the clothes he had on, for he is described as having been dressed very much as we are. This piece

of minor information seemed to delight Miss Poles, who had never attempted to conceal her fear that we shall find M. de Guéran reduced to the condition of a savage, which, she is wont to add, would be very shocking.

The natives are very clear about the route adopted by the white man on leaving their village for the next hamlet, but we can gain no information as to the direction he took on the day when he finally quitted their country, or, indeed, whether he ever left it. Their knowledge and information never extend beyond a radius of five or six leagues; the districts in the north are entirely ignorant of what passes in those of the centre and south. It could not well be otherwise in countries where communication is a matter of difficulty, and newspapers are unknown. We can only be assured on this point when we reach the monarch, who, according to all accounts, appears to have hospitably entertained the European traveller. In the meantime, thanks to the intelligence of the Maleggas, we can trace, to a certain extent, each stage made by our fellow-countryman. He arrived amongst them in the middle of October, just as we were setting out from Paris in search of him. That, seeing that we are now in October, 1873, is precisely a year ago. We can, even, approach him in thought more nearly than that, as he certainly remained amongst the Maleggas for several months,

taking advantage of their hospitality to recruit his forces, to pick up again, in vulgar *parlance*, in order to attempt fresh enterprises. Six or eight months only, therefore, separate us from him—a blank of six or eight months, how has he filled up that blank? That is a question which we must lose no time in answering.

As we approach the royal residence the country becomes still more picturesque, and the villages succeed each other in closer, more unbroken array. They are dotted here and there on the hills, and nestle amidst their wooded and flowering slopes. We are tempted to forget Africa and to imagine ourselves in Normandy. Goats frisk about the hills, cattle find luxuriant pasture in the plains, and diminutive shepherds armed with miniature lances and clubs keep watch over the flocks and herds. Pretty girls, with upright carriage and shapely limbs, bearing huge jars on their heads, wend their way towards the river. In front of the huts, under a sort of verandah composed of banana branches, the family take their ease, from the hoary-headed ancient to the toddling infant just taking his first lessons in walking. The sun pours his rays in streams over this landscape; odours of ineffable sweetness escape from the flower-laden bushes, and the birds sing amongst the branches. We push as far as possible ahead of the army to revel, free and untroubled, in the glorious beauty of the scene.

At length the roll of our drums is echoed by a similar sound from afar, shouts are heard, men run to meet us, soldiers appear. Kadjoro is advancing to welcome his ally Munza. Despite the simplicity of his manner and customs, he has seized on the opportunity for display. An African sovereign could never deny himself that pleasure.

CHAPTER XI.

The King of the Maleggas took his royal brother by the hand, and led him towards an immense baobab, underneath which he is in the habit of holding his receptions and administering justice. A space of about twenty square yards is carpeted with ox hides, and trunks of trees, covered with hyæna, lion, and leopard skins, serve for the throne and its surrounding seats.

Whilst we lingered behind the two chiefs, and in the midst of their respective escorts, I examined Kadjoro. He is a man about thirty years of age, tall and robust. His manner is a mixture of the rustic and the warrior. His features are regular and agreeable; his eyes black, fine and full of expression; his hair, or, to describe it more correctly, his mane is parted in the middle of his forehead, and falls behind his ears in numerous twists, reaching to the shoulders. Feathers of the ostrich, eagle and vulture are stuck at intervals in this thick wool. In his left hand he holds a shield of buffalo hide, in his right a club, and, after the manner of his tribe, a portion of his body is covered with a pair of

very ample breeches. Looking only at his features, his physiognomy generally, and his olive complexion, one might take him for a European; his mane, ornaments, and tattoo-marks make him a savage, "but a very handsome savage," affirms Miss Poles, who has already, from behind her blue spectacles, made her little observations, and gives us the benefit of them.

"Take care," said de Morin to me in a whisper, "she is quite capable of falling in love with Kadjoro, and indulging in some fresh folly."

I promised my friend that I would watch over her.

The King has not yet taken his seat; he converses with his guest, and is questioning him, undoubtedly about us, for he frequently looks in our direction, a proceeding which puts Miss Poles in a great state of excitement, she being already persuaded that the new monarch is noticing and admiring her.

"How far superior he is to Munza!" she repeats, incessantly.

Suddenly, Kadjoro, having, doubtless, heard all about us from his royal friend, leaves him abruptly, comes to where we are standing, shakes hands with us three, bows to our two companions, just as we Europeans should do, and, by a wave of his hand, invites us to follow him.

"He is charming," whispers Delange; "this savage has the manners of a *grand seigneur*."

Reminding him that Kadjoro must by this time know of our connection with M. de Guéran, we follow the King and set foot on the carpet of skins.

Our entrance into the reserved enclosure is made to the accompaniment of Malegga music. A score of musicians, placed at a convenient distance, blow to the full extent of their lungs into elephants' tusks shaped like shells, at the same time keeping in perpetual motion their arms and legs, on which, at the wrists, knees, and ankles, are hung small iron bells. Behind these musicians stand the members of the royal Court, eager to see us; everybody is standing on tip-toe, and some high dignitaries, forgetful of the proprieties, even get on their neighbours' backs. But no one dares penetrate into the enclosure reserved for the King and his guests. Not a single woman is to be seen anywhere; it appears that, amongst the Maleggas, they are excluded from all public meetings.

At a sign from Kadjoro, the orchestra is silent. We take our places on the seats pointed out to us by the King, and the interview, to which we have for so long looked forward, commences.

"Welcome to my kingdom!" were the first words of Kadjoro. "You are the friends of my ally, the King of the Monbuttoos. That is

sufficient for me, and I do not need any explanation of your plans."

"We, on the contrary," said de Morin, at once, "wish to inform you of those plans. We can have no secrets from one who has behaved in so generous and hospitable a manner towards us ever since we have been in his dominions."

"Speak," replied the King, "and I will endeavour to be of service to you."

"We quite believe you. To see you and hear you is to believe in your sincerity."

De Morin had expressed the opinion of all of us. At first sight we were drawn towards this savage, so superior to all those whom we had seen, even to the King of the Monbuttoos himself.

"Whatever you do, do not wound our touchy Munza by being too complimentary to his ally," said I to de Morin.

"Make your mind easy," replied my friend. "His turn will come."

Turning again towards Kadjoro, he resumed, aloud—

"We are in search of a white man, our father. He stayed for some time in this country, and we are come to you for news of him."

"Your father! The white man was your father?"

De Morin was fully alive to all the dangers of the situation, but, resolute as ever, he did not even take the trouble to enter into any ex-

planation, lest by so doing he should arouse the suspicions of Munza, who was drinking in every word of the conversation. He hoped also, for reasons already explained, that the title of father, bestowed upon M. de Guéran, would pass unnoticed, or that in any case Kadjoro would not attach any importance to it.

He was not mistaken. The King evidently recalled to his mind the worn features of M. de Guéran, his long beard, his flowing locks, his countenance seared by severe illness, and, glancing at Madame de Guéran, young, charming, and with her colour heightened by the excitement under which she was labouring, he acknowledged to himself that she might well be the stranger's daughter.

Without, however, giving him time to utter a word, which might have been dangerous for us, de Morin went on to say—

"We have made a long and perilous journey to obtain an interview with you. We beg you, therefore, to tell us all you know about him who was your guest."

"Yes, he was both my guest and my friend," said the Malegga chief, in a tone almost of affection.

"Where is he?" asked de Morin, quickly. "Can he still be in your dominions?"

"No, no," said the King, sadly; "he left me long ago."

We all shared in the emotion now exhibited

by Madame de Guéran. She had risen from her seat, and pale and trembling, but determined to know all as soon as possible, she herself questioned the African monarch through the medium of Nassar.

These questions were not, perhaps, put in the order in which I now write them, but the interview, so interesting to all of us, not excepting Munza, is to this day so vividly impressed on my memory, that I feel sure I do not forget a single incident, nor err, either as to the sense of the questions, or the answers to them, which were given without the slightest hesitation, and with the utmost candour.

"Is he who was your guest still living?" asked Madame de Guéran, abruptly.

"I do not know," was the reply. "Since the day he crossed my frontier, I have had no news of him."

"When did he leave you?"

Kadjoro made a calculation, and entered into some explanations with Nassar, from which we gathered that scarcely six months had elapsed since the departure of M. de Guéran.

"Which direction did he take on leaving you?"

"Towards the south, in the direction of the mountains."

"What country would he enter on crossing your frontier?"

"Ulindi."

"Is it large?"

"Yes; it extends as far as the mountains."

"What is the name of the King who rules over it?"

"It is not a King; it is a Queen—Queen Walinda, who has given her name to her kingdom and her subjects. They are called Walindis."

Nassar informed us that in Africa, when the name of a country begins with *U*, that of the inhabitants commences with *Wa*.

"Do you think that this Queen has allowed our father to continue his journey?"

"No, I do not think so. She does not even allow her neighbours, or her allies like ourselves, to enter her kingdom."

"Nevertheless, from what you say, our father appears to have entered it?"

"Yes, against all my advice. But he would be made prisoner at once."

"You are sure of that?"

"It cannot have happened otherwise, for he has not returned to my dominions."

"There would be no necessity for his returning, if he could succeed in crossing the mountains?"

"He could not cross them. They are the boundary of the earth; it ends there."

Instead of combating this error, de Morin said to the King—

"Then, if our father still lives, we shall find him amongst the Walindis?"

"No, you will never find him. You will be taken prisoners, as he has been, as soon as you set foot in the country."

"We will purchase the right of going through it," said I at once.

Nassar had scarcely time to translate these words before the King demanded an explanation; he could not grasp the meaning of my expression. In the districts where the ivory and slave merchants have not penetrated, the idea of securing a right of way by payment has not entered the minds of the natives; they consider that everybody is free to traverse the uncultivated districts, and, with few exceptions, look upon a visit from a stranger as a compliment. If, in the districts watered by the Nile and on the high road of the caravans, any tribute is exacted, it is simply because the slave merchants, fearing the loss of their prisoners, have adopted the custom of offering presents to the chiefs for the purpose of securing their good-will. For a long time the latter remained in ignorance of the reason why their wishes were thus anticipated, but they have since then taken kindly to the custom, and now display the greatest rapacity towards white men, all of whom they regard indiscriminately as traders in human flesh.

"The Queen of the Walindis," resumed Kadjoro, as soon as he understood what we meant, "will decline your presents, and will not allow you even to get as far as her palace."

"We will get there by force," said de Morin.

"It is evident that you do not know my neighbours," replied the King. "I am strong and powerful, but yet I pay them a tribute to prevent them making war on me."

"Their army, then, is more numerous than yours?"

"No, but the battalions of women of whom it is composed frighten my soldiers."

The King perceived our astonishment, and hastened to give Nassar the following details. At the commencement of his reign, the Walindis suddenly invaded his country on a cattle-stealing expedition. He had defended himself valiantly, and was on the point of gaining a decisive victory, when a numerous force of women, commanded by the Queen in person, appeared on the scene and, in a few moments, routed his whole army. These female warriors, of whose very existence he was ignorant, were young, for the most part lovely, and strong and brave to a degree. They did not waste any time in shooting arrows, or fighting at a distance; they came to close quarters at once, and committed fearful havoc with their steel pikes and long knives. It was impossible to seize them, or even to approach them at all closely; their foreheads, necks, waists, wrists, legs below the thigh, and feet above the ankle, were surrounded with iron rings barbed with sharp points a foot long, which served at once for offensive and defensive

weapons. The King added that, whilst fighting, they utter most terrifying cries, their eyes flash fire, and they foam at the mouth; they give no quarter, despise making prisoners, and, as soon as they have wounded an enemy, they despatch him. Consequently, these women inspire the Maleggas with unconquerable fear, and it was because of this fear that Kadjoro had come to the conclusion that he had better make a few prudent concessions to his neighbours, and purchase the alliance of their Queen, the lovely and invincible Walinda, as she is called in this country.

"It seems to me," said de Morin, turning to us, "that in the heart of Africa we have found a second kingdom of Dahomey."

"And it seems to me," whispered Delange in my ear, "that I shall very soon find myself in the presence of my Venus in ebony."

CHAPTER XII.

If the Amazons, whose existence has just come to our knowledge are too formidable for us to make light of them, we must on no account allow it to be supposed that they cause us any alarm.

Consequently, de Morin, addressing the King, went on to say—

"I can quite understand that your troops, armed only with lances and clubs, are afraid of the Queen of the Walindis and her female warriors. But it need not be the same with us, because our arms enable us to keep the enemy at a distance, and so avoid the hand to hand conflicts which you describe as being so deadly."

"I know your arms," replied the King, "your fellow-countryman spoke to me of their effect. I know that they make thunder, but I also know that they cannot always make it. The time comes sooner or later when they are of no more use than these clubs of ours which you appear to despise."

M. de Guéran had evidently explained to Kadjoro, so far as such a thing was possible, the mechanism of fire-arms, and the negro king

was fully aware of their uselessness without ammunition.

"You are quite right," replied de Morin, holding up his rifle, "in supposing that there is a time when this weapon can no longer kill. But a few moments alone would suffice to disperse or destroy the whole force of Walindis. Ask your ally how long it took to conquer the Domondoos after we appeared on the scene."

Kadjoro drew himself up. We had not convinced him.

"My neighbours in the south," said he, "are far more formidable than those in the north. I do not fear the Domondoos, but I do dread the Walindis. You may massacre one half of their army, and the remainder will exterminate you and yours. Your father knew their power and shared my fears."

"Which, by the way," replied de Morin, "did not prevent him from venturing into the midst of them alone. We cannot hesitate to do what he has done, more especially when his safety is at stake."

Kadjoro, obstinate as all negroes are, did not budge an inch.

"Your fellow-countryman was alone," he persisted, "and there was no reason to fear him; his life has, therefore, probably been spared. You are numerous and well-armed, and, consequently, they will kill you."

"Very well, they will kill us," exclaimed de

Morin and Delange, simultaneously, my voice coming up behind like an echo.

Instead of admiring us, Kadjoro looked at us with a pitying air; with him wisdom and prudence predominated over enthusiasm. But the King of the Monbuttoos came to our rescue; if Kadjoro had the bump of obstinacy very strongly developed, his African brother was proud to excess, and de Morin at once made every effort to rouse that pride. Munza fell into the trap immediately, and, taking the King of the Maleggas aside, told him that he would never abandon the white people, who were his guests and his friends, but that he would march with them against the tribe which held their father in captivity.

"In that case you will be utterly annihilated," observed Kadjoro, calmly.

Nothing could have served our purpose better than this speech. Munza was furious, declaring that his army was invincible, and that he would soon prove it. If Madame de Guéran had not joined us in smoothing him down, he would have declared war, on the nail, against the King of the Maleggas in order to show his power. But, from that moment we could rely upon our powerful ally; he was determined to have a trial of strength with the Walindis. It is quite possible that the cunning Kadjoro was playing a similar game to our own; he was urging Munza on against his own inconvenient

and dangerous neighbours, people whom he dared not attack, but whom his ally, led away by his pride, was bent on fighting. Whatever might be the result of the struggle, the King of the Maleggas had nothing to lose, and everything to gain; a defeat of the Monbuttoos would render them less exacting as regards an ally who had up to that time been treated by them as a vassal, whilst their success, on the other hand, would diminish the power of the Walindis, and, perhaps, do away with his paying any further tribute to them. Negro monarchs are, very frequently, rather clever politicians, and Kadjoro, more intelligent than his contemporaries, might, if the worst came to the worst, not only turn diplomatist, but be a grand success in that line.

In the course of one hour we had made a great step in advance; we had received the most positive information that, six months previously, the Baron de Guéran had started off in the direction of Ulindi and we had strong reasons for supposing that he was still in that territory, only a few days' march from us. Finally, Munza, who might very reasonably have declined to proceed any farther southwards, had decided, not merely from a desire to please Madame de Guéran, but impelled by his pride as a negro and a king, to accompany us, and, with us, attempt fresh adventures. It was no longer an effort to induce him to move

onwards; on the contrary, we had our work cut out to limit his zeal, and tone down an eagerness, which, if applied in a wrong direction, would do us positive harm.

In reality, if, as Kadjoro asserted, his neighbours are formidable, Munza's army, notwithstanding our support, may be defeated and exterminated, and we may share its fate. In our interest, therefore, in that of Madame de Guéran—in short, on all accounts we must, if we can manage it, avoid coming to blows with this Venus in ebony, as Delange persists in calling her.

Madame de Guéran, whose influence over Munza was all the greater by reason of her never condescending to make use of it, undertook to preach prudence to the King, without, however, extinguishing all his warlike fire. She advised him to send to Walinda a regular embassy, charged with proposals for an alliance and a request for an interview. If the Queen assented, the army of the Monbuttoos would enter the neighbouring territory peaceably, and would assist us in our endeavour to liberate our compatriot. If, on the other hand, Walinda declined the alliance, that army would march against her, and the Europeans, with easy consciences, this time fighting on their own behalf, would render assistance to the Monbuttoos.

One difficulty, however, presented itself. How

were Munza's ambassadors to reach the Queen, in a country ever on the alert, always suspicious, and where the chiefs of districts had orders to treat all strangers as enemies?

Kadjoro helped us out of this dilemma. It was his time for paying the Walindis his annual tribute, and he offered to let his envoys accompany ours. Munza's officers would mingle indiscriminately with the Maleggas, would pass unnoticed in their midst, and in that way would reach the royal palace, situated at the other extremity of the kingdom, at the foot, according to all accounts, of the mountains. This offer was accepted, and we took a speedy leave of Kadjoro. Our departure was as simple as our arrival had been; a little music, a few shouts, and that was all. Whether the King of the Maleggas had a contempt for excessive pomp and show, or whether he was not in a position to display it, his reception of us was not to be named in the same breath with that vouchsafed by the King of the Monbuttoos, except that it was far more frank and cordial.

As soon as we got back to camp, de Morin joined me, and, taking his arm, I said—

"You are quite of opinion, are you not, that the despatch of Munza's ambassadors to Ulindi will not suffice for us? They are going to propose an alliance and an interview, very important, I admit, if M. de Guéran is a prisoner

there, which is possible, probable even, but by no means certain. The great point with us is to find out whether the Baron is actually present in the neighbouring district, and to commit that task to somebody on whom we can rely."

"Precisely so," replied de Morin, "and I pushed on the business of the embassy in order to settle the question of M. de Guéran with as little delay as possible. If we receive news of his death, we shall then only have to get rid of Munza, and try to reach Zanzibar by some route more to the south, which will enable us to avoid these terrible Walindis. In that case, we might skirt the Blue Mountains and reach Lake Victoria by Ouando, without paying any attention to Lake Albert. For Delange's sake I shall be sorry to make this *détour*, for he is burning to see this Venus in ebony of his, but, before all things, I must look after our own safety. If, on the other hand, our envoy should find M. de Guéran a prisoner in the hands of the neighbouring tribe, we will endeavour to communicate with him, and get him to tell us what plan he may have formed for escape."

"Admirably conceived," said I, "but have you settled who this trusted envoy is to be? He must be brave, reliable, intelligent, devoted, and prudent. Who is there amongst us who unites in himself these indispensable qualifications?"

"Delange, you, and I," replied de Morin. "But we cannot ask the doctor to make such a sacrifice; it would be taking advantage of him. As for you, my dear Périères, though I detest you as my rival, I have the sincerest friendship for you, and I could not suggest your doing what I myself am incapable of undertaking. My devotion to Madame de Guéran stops at the point of making myself an object of ridicule."

"Ridicule?" I repeated. "I do not understand you. What do you mean?"

"What!" replied de Morin. "Cannot you see that, taking into consideration the hostile attitude of the Walindis, a white man could only form part of the proposed embassy by metamorphosing himself entirely, and passing for a Malegga or a Monbuttoo? Not a very difficult business, either; I would undertake to transmogrify myself in an hour into a savage, and the transformation would be a success, I assure you. But the fear of ridicule, as I have already told you, is precisely the thing that holds me back. I know what women are; there are certain impressions which they cannot get over. Madame de Guéran, as soon as she knew that I was going to set out alone to discover her husband, would exclaim—'What a splendid fellow that M. de Morin is, and how devoted!' But when I appeared on the scene, clean shaved, with ostrich feathers in my hair, powdered with

cinders to darken my skin, still too white despite the efforts of the sun, tattoed with all the colours of the rainbow, three parts dressed in cow-hide breeches, with naked feet, a club in one hand, and a shield in the other, she would burst out laughing and show all her pretty teeth, and I should be for ever lost, as far as she is concerned. And her husband? Cannot you picture to yourself her husband refusing to take me for an European? I should have to say to him—'I am not a savage, as you think I am; I am a Parisian, M. de Morin, Rue Taitbout, near Tortoni's. I have been chasing you for the last six months, in company with your wife, whom I love. I am going back to her, give me some message to take with me—' No, my dear Périères, a thousand times no! Notwithstanding my devotion, I have not the courage to make myself so ridiculous, and I advise you to follow the example of my reserve. If, however, in spite of my advice, you choose to convert yourself into a savage—you will, perhaps, play the part more naturally than I should—I have nothing more to say, and I will let you go without displaying any great amount of annoyance. The friend will be grieved indeed, but the rival will rub his hands."

"Let the friend make his mind quite easy," I replied, "and do not let the rival be in too great a hurry to rejoice. I cannot, any more than you, afford to run counter to prejudice.

Let us give up the idea of sacrificing ourselves, and turn our attention to finding somebody who will sacrifice himself in our stead, and allow us to travesty him."

"Let us think," said de Morin.

He thought for a moment, and then exclaimed—

"Eureka!"

"Who is it?"

"Miss Poles."

CHAPTER XIII.

The idea of disguising Miss Poles as a savage was more amusing than practical. I remarked to de Morin that she would be in the same boat with ourselves; she lacked neither the courage nor the intelligence for such an adventure, but she would dread ridicule as much as we did. And besides this, I felt bound to point out that the scanty amount of costume allowed for the part would be another obstacle in the way.

"You see, my dear fellow," I continued, "that we must lose no time in finding a substitute for Miss Poles. Munza, as regards energy and promptitude of decision, has nothing of the negro about him. I can see him down below there in the midst of his officers. He has very likely made his choice of ambassadors by this time, and by to-morrow, if not to-night, they may be on the road. We must think again."

"What do you say to Nassar? He is trusty and devoted to us."

"He is a Dinka," I replied. "There would be considerable difficulty in passing him off as a Malegga or a Monbuttoo. These people cannot

help betraying their nationality, because, to say nothing of other details, their gums, deprived, according to the custom of their country, of several teeth, would at once call attention to them. In addition to this, Nassar is proud of his so-called uniform, especially his boots. You would have some difficulty in persuading him to leave those off, seeing that he would be afraid of losing his *prestige*. Nassar is no more destitute of *amour-propre* than we are."

"There only remain," said de Morin, "our two Arab interpreters, Omar and Ali. The latter, especially, has given us many proofs of his devotion, courage, and intelligence. To him, as well as to you, I owe my rescue from bondage amongst the Bedouins of El-Hejaz."

"Happy thought!" I exclaimed. "Our brave Ali will do capitally. He has for a long time been complaining of his inaction; he is jealous of Nassar, who is, in these parts, the more useful of the two, and he will, I have no doubt, be thoroughly satisfied with our choice.."

"But," observed de Morin, "he does not understand the dialect of the country."

"So much the better. Will not his sole duty consist of looking about him, making observations, and telling us what he has seen? It would be dangerous for him to question the Walindis about M. de Guéran; he would at

once, in that case, rouse their suspicions, and the Queen must at all hazards be kept in ignorance that any search is on foot after her prisoner. We ought to rejoice over Ali's ignorance of the language. He will be mute—at all events until he meets M. de Guéran and can speak to him. He knows quite enough of French for that."

"You have convinced me," said de Morin. "Let us go to the Baroness, who is chatting, as you see, with Delange, and apprise her of our plan. If she approves, we must act without loss of time."

The same evening our interpreter, Ali, was in a position to pass as a native of the country. His olive tint would not have been suspected by a Malegga, and, on the score of tattooing, de Morin, who took that in hand, had succeeded admirably.

"Ah," said he, as he covered our interpreter's skin with suns, arabesques, birds, and animals, "how I should have enjoyed doing this on Miss Poles' back! It is really too cruel that an artist is not allowed to choose his own canvas."

Whilst de Morin was thus transforming an Arab into a Malegga, Delange and I drew up a letter intended for M. de Guéran, in case our envoy should meet him without being able to speak to him.

This note was couched in the following terms—

"An expedition, sent from Europe in search of you, is aware of your being a prisoner amongst the Walindis. Lose no time in joining it in the country of your former host, Kadjoro, or, if that is out of your power, send a line by our envoy to let us know how best we can rescue you."

We had settled with Madame de Guéran that her name was not to be mentioned, because if the Baron were to know that his wife, whom he believed to be in Paris, was so near him, he might be tempted, in order to join her, to commit some act of imprudence which would cost him his life.

The embassy, composed of ten Monbuttoos, thirty Maleggas, with whom went Ali, and a thousand oxen, sent by Kadjoro as tribute to Queen Walinda, started on the 10th of October. A month must elapse before their return, and that time was barely sufficient to accomplish the end de Morin had in view—to form a battalion capable of aiding us and reinforcing our escort. This body, according to our friend's idea, was to be composed of a hundred men, armed with rifles and revolvers. We had arms enough for such a number, and we looked to the King of the Monbuttoos to furnish us with the men. We had, hitherto, refused to let him

have any of our reserve arms, because we were afraid that we might have to fight him in order to regain our liberty. This fear was still present with us, but it had to yield before a necessity that might soon be ours—that of coming to blows with the renowned and formidable people of Ulindi.

Munza, following our advice, chose, with the greatest care, from out his army a hundred tried men, who were placed under the direct orders of de Morin. The latter armed them, taught them how to use their rifles and revolvers, and gave them firing drill every day. In conjunction with our Nubians, they formed a very respectable battalion, quite capable of keeping the Walindis, male and female, in check. At the same time, calling to my recollection what I had learnt during the siege of Paris, I taught them battalion drill to a certain extent, including skirmishing, rallying on a given point, and such other evolutions as had not escaped my memory.

Kadjoro smiled as he saw all this going on. He began to admit, but only to himself, that his terrible neighbour, to whom he had just sent the flower of his flocks and herds, might, thanks to us, very probably become less formidable. But, as a man of prudence, he obstinately refused to allow his army to join that of Munza. He was both frank in his refusal, and logical in his reason for it.

"If I unite with you to fight the Walindis," he said to his African colleague, "you, as soon as the war is over, will hasten to return to your own country with your prisoners and your booty—*voila tout*, as far as you are concerned. The Queen will never revenge herself by attacking you in your dominions; you live too far away, and you are too powerful. But I, as her next-door neighbour, shall have to bear the brunt of her vengeance, and she will make me pay dearly for the damage I have done in concert with you. If, on the contrary, she defeats us, she will not rest until she has taken possession of my kingdom—a long-cherished wish on her part. I would rather that she did not recognize any of my soldiers in the ranks of your army. By these means she will have nothing wherewith to reproach me, and we shall continue to live on terms of good understanding."

Whilst we were doing our best to carry out the transformation of Munza's army, Madame de Guéran lived quite apart from us. The various phases of emotion through which she had passed, her continual state of apprehension, fear, and uncertainty, added, possibly, to the dryness of the season and its abnormal heat, completely shook her nervous system, and rendered her subject to an intermittent fever, which even quinine was powerless to subdue. She never went outside the tolerably spacious hut erected for her by Kadjoro, and only received

us at long intervals. We respected the seclusion imposed upon her by her mental anxiety and bodily sufferings, and de Morin and I were quite men enough to understand the trouble she was in, and the struggle going on within her mind. Delange, who was confidant and doctor in one, said to us sometimes—

"She suffers terribly, I assure you; but she is a charming woman!"

A charming woman! We know that only too well for the sake of our peace of mind.

This moral prostration from which Madame de Guéran was suffering, and the fever which kept her a prisoner in her hut, presented, at all events, one advantage. Munza, whose passion had seemed to increase, a circumstance which placed us in a perpetual state of anxiety lest we should have to repress some folly on his part, became gradually calmer as his idol was no longer visible.

Love in a negro, there is no disguising the fact, is exclusively material; the heart is not concerned in it, and memory vanishes with the disappearance of the object beloved. These imperfect beings are cognizant of the transport of passion, but the infinite tenderness of love is a sealed book to them. Absence, which revives our love, extinguishes theirs; neither in thought nor in imagination can they to-day dwell upon the being they worshipped yesterday. Sickness, also, instinctively repels them; accus-

tomed to look down upon a woman and to regard her as a beast of burden, she becomes to them a useless incumbrance and devoid of existence from the moment she succumbs to bodily suffering. I am persuaded that Munza, infatuated yesterday, and ready to become so again to-morrow, is to-day so calm and tranquil in mind that, if it were not for his pride and obstinacy, he would let us proceed on our journey without opposition.

November 6.—Our embassy cannot now be long in making its appearance, and we have decided to go as far as the frontier to meet it. We shall thus more speedily obtain the news we are so impatiently awaiting, and we shall be in readiness to enter the territory of the Walindis, either to fight them, or to have an interview with their Queen, as the case may be.

November 25th.—At last the caravan is in sight, just as we had given up all hope of ever seeing it again. Warned of its arrival, we have all of us emerged from our tents. Yes! There is no doubt about it. There is Ali in front. He recognizes us, and hurries to meet us. Why such haste, if he has no news of M. de Guéran? The Arab and the negro, when they are conscious of failure, dissemble and try to hide their want of success. Our interpreter must have some great news for us—our fate is on the point of being decided.

CHAPTER XIV.

Ali, our interpreter, was with us in a few seconds.

"I see by your eyes," I exclaimed, as soon as he reached us, "that you have succeeded in your mission."

"Yes," replied the Arab triumphantly, "I have succeeded."

"You have discovered M. de Guéran?"

"I have found him, seen him, spoken to him."

"What did he tell you to say to us?"

"Nothing; he was not able to say a word, but I have something to give you."

He put his hand into the leather bag which hung from his waist-belt, pulled out a small sheet of paper, and handed it to us.

I opened it. Yes—it was the handwriting of M. de Guéran, the same handwriting as that of the letter given to us at Khartoum by Nassar, the same as that of the placard we found in the Domondoo hut.

I did not feel myself justified in reading the letter before Madame de Guéran had seen it. Though her health had improved from the

moment she quitted Kadjoro's residence to accompany the army to the frontier, she was still too weak to leave the camp, and she was consequently ignorant of the arrival of the caravan. On Delange devolved the duty of telling her the news, which would have indeed been a hard task for de Morin or myself, and of giving her the letter sent by her husband.

When we were alone with Ali we began our enquiries. De Morin, very nervous, very much agitated, but, at the same time, very clear and precise in his questions, opened the ball.

"Why," he asked, "have you been so long away? You have been absent now for more than six weeks, and the journey there and back, according to what the King has told us, as a rule does not take more than a month. Did the Queen detain you, as prisoners, any time?"

"No," said Ali, "but her people would scarcely let us pass. All the chiefs of districts made us wait for orders before they would allow us to go on. Besides, the country is not at all like this; at every step we came across torrents flowing down from the mountains. Storms are of frequent occurrence at the end of the rainy season, and we lost a great deal of time in overcoming all these difficulties."

"Did you come across a large lake, marked on some of our maps as Lake Piaggia?"

"No, I never saw it. There is no such thing in the country."

"Is the territory of the Walindis of great extent?"

"Yes, twenty days' march before you get to the royal palace."

"Is it a fact, as we have been told, that the palace is on the eastern frontier of the kingdom?"

"It is at the foot of a lofty and impassable mountain."

Our interpreter, no doubt, meant that mountain which the latest African explorers call Mount Maccorly or M'Caroli.

"And behind that mountain," I asked, "are there others?"

"Yes, larger still, so large that they hide the sky. Their tops appear quite blue, and at night a great noise may be heard coming from their bowels, like the sound produced by a hundred torrents falling together from a lofty height."

"Those are the falls spoken of as being at the north end of Lake Albert," said de Morin to me. "The information given us by Ali leads to the inference that the residence of Walinda is situated at the foot of the Blue Mountains, in Lat. 2° N., and that Lake Albert is immediately behind those mountains. The noise heard by our interpreter evidently proceeds from the cascades, falls, or cataracts on the eastern shores of the lake, at the same elevation as Magungo, and called by certain geographers the Murchison Falls. All these details are valuable,

for I certainly think," added de Morin, somewhat bitterly, "that we are now called upon to work on behalf of M. de Guéran by throwing him, as soon as possible, into the arms of his wife."

"My dear fellow," said I, "our first duty is to rescue our fellow-countryman. Suppose, for a moment, that we did not know him, and that, instead of being the husband of our companion, he were a stranger to us, should we hesitate for a moment to go to his rescue?"

"No," replied de Morin quickly, "certainly not. All Europeans who venture into these parts are mutually bound to aid and protect each other. Nevertheless," he added, after a momentary pause, "during the last few seconds, since the existence of M. de Guéran has been established, a queer, novel, perhaps unworthy idea has entered my head and worries me."

"Let us have your idea, by all means. Possibly I have one very like it."

"I guessed as much. You are asking yourself, as I am, whether M. de Guéran is really a prisoner with the Queen of the Walindis, endowed by common report with so much beauty, this Venus in ebony, as Delange will call her? You are tempted to believe that he is staying by her side of his own free will, and that he does not half like the idea of an expedition from Europe coming to interfere with his love-making?"

"I do not go quite to the same length that

you do, my dear friend," I replied, smiling. "It is quite possible, indeed, that our compatriot has not always been insensible to the beauty of this female savage, and that she, on her side, is infatuated about the first white man she has ever seen, just as Munza is about the first white woman brought to his notice. This sort of thing is by no means rare in Africa. But a man of intellect like M. de Guéran, a Parisian, is not very likely to surrender the habits of a life-time, civilization, and a wife such as his, simply to spend his days in the society of a native of Ulindi! Depend upon it, I am right. Ask any Parisian you like who has visited Egypt, Palestine, and such-like places. M. de Guéran, whatever position he may occupy amongst the Walindis, is deserving of our sympathy. But, Ali, no doubt, can give us some information as to what that position is. Let us continue our cross-examination of him, and cut short our private reflections, which, after all, as you will admit, proceed from jealousy."

Having thus delivered myself, I turned towards our interpreter, and said to him—

"You were received by Queen Walinda?"

"Yes, sir; the caravan entered her palace, a mass of mud huts covered with branches."

"What did you think of her? Is she as pretty as everybody says she is?"

"Yes, and prettier still," replied the Arab

quickly. "She is tall and majestic, with a light brown complexion, ruddy lips, teeth like ivory, and large eyes gleaming between the black fringe of her eye-lashes."

I was afraid that this enthusiasm might involve a waste of time, so I changed the subject.

"Was M. de Guéran with her," I asked, "when you saw him?"

"Yes, he never leaves her, or, really, she never leaves him. He walks by her side, and they are surrounded by fifty female warriors, all young, better made even than the Soudan women, supple as serpents, and—"

Ali, ever enthusiastic, was going to plunge into a fresh dissertation, but I stopped him.

"To come back to M. de Guéran," said I. "Did he appear to you to be in good health?"

"No, he was pale, with a hectic flush on his cheeks, and a disheartened look; he was evidently suffering from fever, for he walked with difficulty."

"Is the climate of Ulindi unhealthy?"

"Not in the northern portion of the kingdom, in the midst of the chains of hills we crossed; but a foreigner would find it so in the vast plain where the royal residence is situated. The surrounding mountains prevent the air from reaching it, and that causes a feeling of suffocation. I suffered more from the heat there than in the Nubian deserts."

I looked at de Morin, as much as to say to

him, "You see, M. de Guéran is not quite as happy as you thought he was." Then, turning to Ali, I asked—

"How did you manage to get near our fellow-countryman?"

"The Queen," he replied, "went right through our caravan, in order to make a closer examination of the animals we brought her. I took advantage of the opportunity to get close to the white man and whisper to him, 'your friends send me to you; they wish to deliver you; drop your arm next to me and open your hand. I have a paper to give you.' He started when he heard these words spoken in his native tongue, but he soon recovered himself, and, without saying a word, did as I asked him. At the same moment the Queen rejoined him and they went away together."

"You saw him later on?"

"Yes, when the caravan took leave of Walinda. I managed to get close to him again; he had recognized me, and made a sign to me. I understood from it that he was not able to speak to me, but that he had something to give me. Our two hands met; he shook mine, in token of gratitude, no doubt, and slipped between my fingers the paper I gave you."

"And that is all? He did not say a single word to you?"

"Not a word."

I turned towards de Morin, and said to him—

"You see now, my dear fellow, that M. de Guéran is really a prisoner, and watched more narrowly than he would be on the hulks."

We had now only to thank our brave Ali for his services, and to send him to Madame de Guéran, who, after having read her letter, would certainly wish to question him.

As he was going away, Delange came up to us, and asked us whether we had heard the Queen's reply.

"What reply?" we enquired.

Having for the past hour been exclusively occupied with M. de Guéran and his concerns, we had forgotten all about the embassy sent by the King of the Monbuttoos to the Queen of Ulindi. Delange told us that, after having chatted for a moment with the Baroness, and handed her M. de Guéran's letter, he had joined Munza. The latter had just received the report of his ambassadors, which was to the effect that the Queen absolutely declined either an alliance or an interview with him.

"I do not wish"—to use her own words—"the tribes from the north to enter my kingdom and bring their manners and customs with them. I do not go to them, and why should they come to me? An alliance with them is of no use to me; I am quite strong enough to defend myself against all my neighbours put together. Tell your master to return to his own dominions, and not to send me another

embassy, because, if he does, he will never see it again; I will have every man in it put to death, from the first to the last."

"This reply," said Delange, "as you may well suppose, has exasperated Munza. He wants to cross the frontier at once, and attack the insolent Queen of the Walindis."

"We must not prevent him," replied de Morin. "It is our only method now of rescuing the Baron."

"Perhaps he himself may have pointed out another," I suggested. "Let us go to Madame de Guéran; she must have finished her reading by this time, and will let us see what her husband says."

Without further delay we bent our steps towards the hut occupied by Madame de Guéran in the middle of the encampment.

CHAPTER XV.

Miss Poles was waiting for us.

"The Baroness," said she, "will receive you whenever you wish, but she begs you first of all to glance over these papers. She has just read them, and says that they are addressed to you rather than to her, since M. de Guéran has no idea that she is in Africa."

I took the papers, and drew de Morin into my tent.

"I feared," said I, "that Madame de Guéran would refuse to receive us to-day, and I was astonished at her message."

"You were wrong to fear anything of the kind. The Baroness knows very well that though, as Frenchmen, we may rejoice over the actual and officially-reported resurrection of M. de Guéran, we are rather sorry for it from another point of view. She knows also that we shall bring with us somewhat gloomy countenances, and, with her usual bravery, she wishes to confront us as soon as possible, and arm herself against our despair. Moreover, we must not forget that ever since we left Khartoum, her position towards us has been as open

and clearly-defined as possible; she has not concealed from us her conviction that she should find her husband again, that she did not believe herself to be a widow, and that, instead of having to kneel at the tomb of a dead man, she hoped soon to throw herself into the arms of a living one. She begged us not to follow her; it was our idea not to leave her; so that it is not her fault if we have cherished the hope that M. de Guéran might be dead and buried."

"You are a walking hand-book of logic," I replied, determined not to be behind de Morin in the matter of forced spirits. "Let us study the revelations of the *ci-devant* corpse."

These revelations were written in pencil on some sheets of paper torn out of the self-same note book which had already on several occasions been used by the Baron in his communications.

I have copied these notes into the journal of the expedition, and not into the private memorandum book wherein I jot down, every day, my own personal impressions.

"From the bottom of my heart I thank the European expedition, which, after having so courageously set out in search of me, is to-day bent on rescuing me. But I cannot join it in the Malegga territory, nor can I permit it to come to my aid in Ulindi.

"Flight is out of the question, for all the inhabitants of the country are, in a way, my

gaolers. They know that the Queen intends to keep me prisoner, and nobody would dare to oppose her will.

"Three months ago I attempted to escape, and I got as far as five leagues in the direction of the mountains. On the day after I started all Walinda's guards were despatched in pursuit of me, and discovered my hiding-place. I was conducted back to the royal residence with every mark of respect, but the whole of the villages through which I had passed, and where I was supposed to have received hospitality, were burnt by order of the Queen, and all their inhabitants put to death. More than three hundred beings were massacred. I have no longer any right to escape.

"Neither do I think that I have any right, for the sake of regaining my liberty, to expose Europeans to certain death. The expedition, which so generously offers me its assistance, has already overcome so many obstacles, and surmounted so many and great dangers, that it deems itself capable of emerging safe and sound out of a fresh adventure. It is mistaken; the Walindis do not in any way resemble the other tribes which inhabit the north. They are stronger and more dangerous than the most numerous and most warlike tribes on the African continent. A day, perhaps an hour, will suffice for them to crush a caravan, notwithstanding

the bravery of its soldiers, and the terror caused by fire-arms.

"Two vices, carried to excess, sensuality and sloth, appear to have developed the warlike instincts of this tribe. Determined not to cultivate their ground, more irregular, be it known, than the neighbouring districts, disinclined to breed cattle, hunters and fishers without any natural bent in that direction, but gluttons to excess, and greedy of vegetables, fruits, meat, and fish, the Walindis have gained a gradual reputation for being able to live at the expense of their neighbours. Every inhabitant of the country has turned soldier so as to avoid becoming a husbandman or a shepherd.

"An hereditary and despotic monarchy for a long time presided over the destinies of this tribe, and transmitted, from reign to reign, certain traditions and customs, having, for their object, the maintenance of the warlike spirit of the people. Thus it happened that a prince, acting on the ideas of his predecessors, formed a corps of amazons, which later on became a regular army. These women, enrolled at the age of twelve, are put through a course of training and exercise, which develops their muscles, renders them wonderfully active, and fits them to undergo any amount of fatigue and to brave every danger. One of their exercises consists of hurling themselves, entirely

naked, against a village, defended by fascines of sharp thorns and surrounded by gigantic cacti, and taking it by assault. It is a species of petty warfare far more dangerous than ours, where every combatant leaves strips of flesh behind her, if she does not sustain, as is frequently the case, severe wounds.

"When they attain the age of fifteen, these young girls, by that time converted into robust women, with large shoulders and hardy limbs, active and supple to a degree, are incorporated into the army, which is composed of five battalions, that is to say, five or six thousand warriors. Their weapons are terrible; arrows dipped in a deadly poison, and iron points, like bayonets, which protect their bodies and render their hugs and embraces mortal.

"It is impossible to give any just idea of the discipline prevailing amongst them; the most trivial faults are punished in the severest manner, death being continually decreed. As for rewards, they are eagerly sought after, and, in the case of the women, consist simply of the right to marry. This is, in their idea, the supreme recompense for their fatigue, their sufferings, and their courage. To obtain it, they must have killed an enemy; the most rigorous celibacy is imposed on those who have not fulfilled this condition. As soon as their efforts are crowned with success, they no longer form part of the active army, but belong to a sort of

sedentary militia, constituting the internal police of the country. Their daughters, unless they are deformed, in which case the poor little things are pitilessly massacred, are destined later on to become amazons like their mothers were.

"Women, therefore, are a formidable element of power amongst the Walindis, and it followed, very naturally, that one day, having found out their superiority over the men, they determined to be governed by a Queen instead of a King. This idea, as far as I can learn, was put in force about twenty years ago, the reigning Queen, Walinda, having succeeded, without any masculine interruption, six other sovereigns of her sex. Her eldest daughter, the heiress to the throne, is being brought up in the midst of the amazons, whose labours and dangers she shares. She has no rivals in the shape of brothers to fear, because all the male children of the Queen are smothered on the day they are born. This ostracism, applied to our sex amongst the Walindis, is confined to the throne and the royal dynasty. The government of the various districts is entrusted to men; the male sex has also its army, less formidable than that of the amazons, and inferior in discipline, but far above the armies of other tribes.

"This information, which I beg the European expedition to transmit, in my name, to our various Geographical Societies, will, I trust,

cause my fellow-countrymen to abandon their designs. I intreat them to give up all attempt to rescue me. In my soul and my conscience I feel that they can do nothing for me.

" Let me die in this country, where I have already accomplished some good, where I hope to do more. Walinda keeps me a prisoner, I admit; rather than let me leave her dominions, she would put her whole tribe to death. But when my liberty is not in question, I exercise a serious influence over her mind. She is gradually getting rid of her barbarism. I have already succeeded in inducing her to abolish many bloody customs. I have experienced the joy of saving hundreds of lives, and I trust to save far more.

" If you had only seen the horrible spectacles at which I had to be present during the first part of my stay here! Under the pretence of sacrificing to the Gods, that is to say, to the hideous serpents elevated by the priests and fetish-mongers, what rivers of blood have been set flowing under my very eyes! One of these *fêtes*—heaven save the mark—lasted a whole week, the Queen, surrounded by her personal guard, presiding at it. On the first day a hundred prisoners were led out on to a platform raised in front of the palace. They were seated in huge baskets, thrown together pell-mell, men and women alike, their knees forced up to their chins, their arms bound tightly

across their chests, and their mouths stopped with leaves. At a sign from Walinda, the crowd drew near. I cannot give any idea of the excitement, the gestures, the contortions, and the ferocity of this mob. The joy depicted on every face! The voluptuous looks of the amazons! With craning necks and chests pressed against the platform, with every nerve in their bodies vibrating with pleasure, they hungered for their prey, and gloated over the sufferings of their victims, their nostrils quivering and their sensual mouths half open.

"At a fresh signal the drummers execute a prolonged roll, and a hush succeeds the former din; the Queen, reclining indolently on her mats, half rises, and the sacrificing priests, who were awaiting this signal, commence their office. They drag each prisoner singly from the baskets, bring him to the front of the platform, show him to the crowd, and strangle or behead him forthwith. Each execution is welcomed with cries of joy and frenzied shouts; the spectators leap, dance, roll themselves on the ground, and become a maddened herd, whilst the amazons, delirious with delight, drag themselves along through the dust to kiss the feet of the Queen.

"Well, I hope, nay, I believe that there will be no more such sacrifices! I have prayed the Queen to allow, to ordain no more. I have awakened in her breast some feelings of

humanity; she has promised to spare me these hideous sights she even appears to be conscious of their atrocity.

"Let me be! Let me save fresh victims, and pursue the task imposed on me by circumstances. Do not interrupt me in my work of regeneration, my efforts towards gentleness and peace. The good that I can do in this country will, perhaps, compensate for the wrong I have done in leaving those who were dear to me, those whom I never ought to have left.

"Adieu! adieu! my dear friends. From the bottom of my heart I thank you for your efforts to find me, and your plans for my rescue. They are, alas! beyond realization. It is impossible to save me, nor do I wish it."

CHAPTER XVI.

When we had finished reading these notes I turned to de Morin and said to him—

"Does the Baron de Guéran remind you of Ladislas Magyar?"

"I remember the name," replied de Morin, "but I cannot recall any circumstances in connection with him."

"He was a Hungarian explorer," I replied, "employed in a house of business in Benguela, a country of western Africa. His business obliged him, in 1849, to take a trip into the interior, where he had the misfortune to take the fancy of Ozoro, the lovely daughter of the king of Bihé, who compelled him to marry her. As Ladislas Magyar was never seen again, it was supposed that the jealousy of his wife, and the *surveillance* put in force by her over him, kept him away from his family and his country."

"By quoting this historical and geographical incident," said de Morin to me, "do you wish to advance the opinion that M. de Guéran is the happy lover of Venus in ebony? When I suggested that a moment ago, you scouted the idea."

"Not at all, my dear fellow, you quite misunderstood me. On the contrary, I agreed with you; I merely maintained that the charms of Walinda would not be powerful enough to induce a Parisian to settle down and naturalize himself in Africa. M. de Guéran's letter strengthens me in that conviction. After all, the Baron is flesh and blood like ourselves, capable of becoming, either by force or fancy, the lover of the Queen. But this weakness would not prevent his hankering after freedom. He is perfectly sincere, rely upon it, when he speaks of the work of regeneration which he has in hand. M. de Guéran, the *protégé*, the godson, I believe, of Livingstone, has in his veins some drops of that African missionary's blood. A feverish longing for discovery was not the only motive which induced him to leave his country and his beloved wife; he has also, and above all, the fervour of an apostle, or perhaps, a martyr. Do not destroy my illusion; I experience a certain pleasure in forming this high opinion of the husband of Madame de Guéran. I absolutely refuse to believe that such a right-minded, clear-headed woman would have, of her own free will, chosen a mere seeker after adventures."

"So far from trying to do away with your illusion, as you call it, I share it. I look upon M. de Guéran, the husband, as my personal enemy, and I always place my enemies on a

pedestal so that I may gain all the more credit for upsetting them when I get the chance. Besides, it is not the first time that my thoughts have turned upon M. de Guéran. I often heard him spoken of in France, and I formed a high opinion of him. I respect his memory, and should like to admire his conduct. He is a missionary, an apostle, a martyr, I admit, but he is also a rather queer specimen of humanity, *blasé* with Parisian life and European customs. He knows all the secrets of our countries, and he must needs dive into the mysteries of another continent. He is quite comfortable, believe me, in the midst of this menagerie of wild beasts called amazons, and by the side of this splendid, ferociously amorous queen, whose lord and slave he is at one and the same time."

"Our opinions," I replied, "are not so far apart after all. M. de Guéran is a working missionary, but a layman, if I may so express myself, without any religious 'call;' he does good, civilizes savages, and preaches Christian morality. But he knows also how to mingle the profane with the sacred, and he manages to pass the period of his apostolate as pleasantly as possible. So far we agree. When, however, he speaks of the dangers which lie before us amongst the Walindis, and the utter impossibility of rescuing him, do you believe that he is sincere?"

"I do. His information is strictly correct.

He is convinced that we shall be crushed, smashed to pieces, or cut up into little bits, if we try to save him; but he is mistaken. In his idea, our expedition differs in no way from any other; we are depending on ourselves alone, as indeed we had to do for a long time, and our caravan consists of a hundred bearers and a weak escort—that is his idea. He could not know by intuition that we have at our disposal a hundred and fifty soldiers, armed with European rifles, and more than five thousand men disciplined by us, and roused to fanaticism by their King."

"Then, according to you, under these circumstances we should pay no attention to his warnings and his prayers?"

"Certainly not. Moreover, allow me to observe that if it suits M. de Guéran to plant himself in Africa, to establish there his electoral freehold, and to die there, we are not bound in the same way. We want to get back again to our own country; one route only is open to us—that towards the south, and we are going that way. If we come across the Baron in Ulindi, so much the better, or so much the worse for him, but go that way we must and will. Do you follow me?"

"I entirely agree with you. M. de Guéran is a mere accessory. In saving ourselves we may possibly save him."

"Precisely so, and in that way he will have

nothing to thank us for. That pleases me all the more, for I confess that his gratitude would annoy me slightly."

We might have added that even if we wished to avoid the Walindis and retrace our steps, King Munza would prevent us by insisting on our following him. Our conversation was scarcely at an end, when we heard loud shouts proceeding from the Monbuttoo camp, and emanating, apparently, from the entire army. Whilst we had been discoursing, Munza had taken an innings too. He had called together his troops, and, following the invariable custom of African chiefs, had made a sort of proclamation to them. He narrated his grounds of complaint against the Queen of the Walindis, expatiated with great skill upon the riches of her kingdom and the beauty of the women inhabiting it, and asked his soldiers if they would not like to get possession of the riches and make a *razzia* amongst the inhabitants.

The army replied, as armies generally do to the addresses of their commanders, by loud applause. "*Ee, Ee, tchupy, tchupy, Ee, Munza, Ee,*" resounded on every side, the drums and trumpets began their horrid din once more, bows and lances were waved in the air, and the Monbuttoos, without waiting for marching orders, burnt their camp and made ready to advance against the enemy.

We were obliged to calm this excitement, and

prevail upon Munza not to start until the following day; we had several preparations to make, and it appeared to us a very dangerous proceeding to cross the frontier at nightfall.

When the hour of departure was settled, we had to apprise Madame de Guéran of our proceedings. She was waiting for us. As soon as she saw us she came forward, and, without either hesitation or embarrassment, held out her hand.

"The doctor tells me," she said, "that in spite of the warnings of M. de Guéran you are bent upon making an attempt to rescue him?"

"No," said de Morin; "there you are mistaken. We are not going to rescue anybody; we are only going back to Paris by the shortest possible way."

"No other is open to us," I added, "unless we go back by the way we came, and take up our abode amongst the Monbuttoos for the remainder of our existence."

"You may possibly succeed," she replied, with a smile, "in deceiving yourselves, and being mistaken as to the motives which actuate you, but I know you, and for some time past have formed my estimate of your courage, your generosity, and your self-denial. Depreciate yourselves, if you like, I know what value to place upon you, and you will ever have in my heart the large place which you deserve. I accept this fresh proof of your devotion, and I do not feel inclined even to thank you for it.

One does not thank men like you, one admires and esteems them."

The arrival of Delange cut short this conversation.

"Give me the benefit of your advice," he exclaimed, "for I am terribly puzzled about Miss Poles. She has just been to me, in my tent, in a state of the greatest excitement. 'Doctor,' she cried, 'Doctor, protect me, I beseech you, from myself.'"

"Good heavens!" said I; "what danger is she in?"

"After much beating about the bush, and an immense amount of maidenly hesitation, she ended by confessing that she was madly in love with Kadjoro."

"We suspected as much," said de Morin; "but, my dear Delange, we hand her over to your tender mercies with every confidence."

"No, no, never!" exclaimed Delange. "Oh, what a mistake I made in coming with you instead of Dr. Desrioux! When I think that on this 25th of November, 1873, whilst we are menaced with so many dangers, he is seated quietly by a nice fire, with his friend Pommerelle at his side, and that they are both sticking pins on maps of Africa, following us from tribe to tribe, with their feet on the fender—"

"Oh, bother," said de Morin. "Very likely they are not following us any longer, but have forgotten all about us."

Madame de Guéran, who was present and had smilingly listened to Delange's rhapsody, thought it high time to interfere in defence of Desrioux.

"He has not forgotten us," said she; "and if it had not been for his mother, whom he could not leave, he would have been with us, and would have shared our dangers."

November 26th.—The sun is just rising in all its radiant glory. The army of the King of the Monbuttoos is already on the march, and we are off after it.

CHAPTER XVII.

The King of the Maleggas only left us at the farthest extremity of his kingdom, and very sorry we were to part with this intelligent, humane, and, relatively speaking, civilized chief, who has behaved so well to our caravan. He, too, had tears in his eyes as he warmly shook hands with us, and for a long time we could see him following us with his gaze as we went farther and farther away from him. Miss Poles, of course, assumed that all this was intended for her, and, by way of reply, sent countless kisses through the intervening air. But Delange, notwithstanding his protests, had constituted himself the guardian of this impressionable creature, and he had taken very good care to confine Miss Poles to aërial osculation.

Ali has not misled us; the country through which we are passing does not in any way resemble that of the Maleggas. No more pasture land, no more cultivation, no more pretty little villages nestling among wooded slopes; torrents, rocks, and sharp-pointed stones have replaced all these. We are evidently upon an old spur of the mountain range already visible in the

horizon. Some severe volcanic shock must have produced this effect in days gone by; a portion of the mountain must have been detached, in the first instance, and subjected afterwards to a levelling process which has brought about the stony, unequal, deeply indented ground over which we have been passing to-day.

But vegetation is so luxuriant and irresistible in these parts that superb trees raise their heads amidst weird and jagged ridges, and palms, with their bare stems and fan-like foliage, stand side by side with aloes on the banks of the torrents.

The temperature, in this semi-desert, is stifling; there is but an imperceptible line of shadow at the foot of the rocks, and the earth seems to faint under the burden of the heat. Our army winds slowly, like a huge serpent, along the turnings and twistings of the road. The men march in silence, step by step, rifles in hand, and ready for any emergency. A scouting party has been organized by de Morin to warn us of coming danger, and the army is composed of several battalions, subdivided into companies. We occupy the centre of this force with our own personal escort, and the Monbuttoos whom we have trained in the use of the rifle.

Munza, still suffering from his wound, is close to us, carried on a shield. Madame de

Guéran reclines in a hammock slung from large poles, borne by eight Nubians, who advance with measured step. Delange, de Morin, and I are on foot, the last horse we had having been attacked in the Malegga country by the *tsetse*, a fly whose bite, though harmless to human beings and wild animals, is fatal to horses.

Finally, Joseph, induced by his natural indolence to prolong his period of convalescence, is carried on the back of an ox, converted for the nonce into a beast of burden. The flocks and herds follow after, and they are of considerable dimensions, thanks to the generosity of Kadjoro. We cannot count upon receiving any hospitality at the hands of the Walindis, and we have taken our precautions accordingly. Our caravan and the army generally are plentifully supplied with cattle and grain, for we have come to an arrangement with Munza that there shall be no plundering until we are attacked.

However, there are at present no symptoms of hostility; nobody opposes our advance; no one flies at our approach. On the contrary, in front of every village (we go round them instead of passing through them) the inhabitants assemble to see us pass.

Has Queen Walinda changed her mind about us, or is she at this moment collecting her forces and waiting until we have advanced

farther into the interior of her country to attack us? This latter supposition is the more probable one.

The natives of this district are evidently conscious of their strength, and are not tormented by a thousand and one fears on the approach of strangers. Consequently, when we see them gathered together, it often happens that Delange, de Morin, and I leave the army for the purpose of making a more minute inspection of them.

They are a fine race, superior even to the Maleggas, whose physical attractions have already commanded our admiration. Their facial angle is strictly correct, the forehead rather wide, the lips thick but not swollen, the teeth good and even, and if their noses are not aquiline they are, at all events, delicately rounded. The most complete nudity appears to be obligatory throughout the entire tribe, a decree of banishment having apparently been pronounced against the slightest strip of hide, or the minutest leaf. Some sovereign, in order to give his people full liberty to develop themselves and spread out unfettered, must have decreed a sumptuary law on the most radical lines.

We are not yet in the presence of the regular amazons, those who, according to the report of M. de Guéran, form part of the active army; we only see here and there the sedentary ones,

national guards at the disposal of the chiefs of the various districts. Nevertheless, these second-class women, if I may call them so, would be eagerly sought after as models by all our sculptors. Their necks are well set on spreading shoulders, their limbs are muscular and admirably proportioned, and the play of their muscles is very marked.

"They are superb," says Delange, always enthusiastic over the human form divine in living bronze. "The natives of this country are evidently daughters of Venus, and that goddess of antiquity must have had amongst her numerous train of admirers some negro deity who has been discreetly ignored in the Mythology."

As is the case with several other tribes, the women of Ulindi, disdaining all clothing and ornament, give way to considerable luxury in the manner of dressing their hair. Their thick, abundant tresses, curly rather than woolly, are restrained by a fillet, or network of bark. Instead of falling over the temples, the neck, or the shoulders, all the plaits and straggling locks are gathered together on the top of the head, and rise one above the other until they form a thick pad of hair, a species of extremely solid cushion, capable of resisting any sword cut, however well directed. The majority of these new-fangled helmets are stained with red ochre, a natural dye obtained from the clay deposited by the streams

in the ravines of the country. Some coquettes also dye their eyelashes and eyebrows with this ochre, and from a distance they look like red-haired negroes, a combination which nature, notwithstanding her eccentricities, never allows.

We managed, also, to gain access to some of the huts, surrounded by three circular walls like regular bastions, and surmounted by a spherical roof made of rushes bound together by a fine, flexible sort of grass. As soon as you have stooped down and made your way on all fours through the aperture which serves as a door to these huts, you experience an indefinable sense of enjoyment; to the equatorial heat outside succeeds a most refreshing coolness. In a moment, however, you are anxious to get out again, and make for the door, or hole, to speak more correctly. This arises from the circumstance that two or three brands, placed in a corner of the cabin, are kept continually smoking in order to drive away the mosquitoes and dry the skins which curtain the walls of the hut. I saw many lion skins, there being numbers of those animals, so we were told, in the neighbouring districts. Against these the amazons wage a continual warfare, because in the chances of the chase, as well as of war, they can gain the husband, the reward of their bravery.

December 8th.—For twelve days we have been marching in Ulindi, and still have no news of the Queen! It might be supposed that she was either

entirely ignorant of our arrival in her dominions, or that she does not condescend to bother her head about us. But there is evidently some scheme on foot ; the chiefs of these districts fly at our approach for fear we should question them. All the able-bodied men, and all the women capable of fighting have disappeared from the villages. There only remain the children and old men, who, in fear and trembling, make all sorts of grimaces instead of answering our questions. An appalling void has been created all around us.

We shall soon find out the answer to this terrible riddle, for Ali tells us that we are scarcely three days' march from the royal residence. Moreover, the mountains, which serve as the south eastern frontier of Ulindi, rear themselves up about a dozen leagues from us. We can see their crests, and distinguish every bend in them. In the foreground, and in the centre is Mount Maccorly or M'Caroli, from fifteen to eighteen hundred feet high; behind it are two long chains, one behind the other, whose peaks are lost in the clouds. They lie almost due N.N.E. and S.S.W., and extend for about thirty leagues.

Our telescopes are not only levelled towards this distant horizon ; they are turned in all directions and scan every feature of the landscape. We ourselves do duty as scouts, and we do not allow the army to advance without

reconnoitring at short intervals. This army, moreover, is a source of astonishment to us. Is it conscious of the danger it runs, and does it obey us instinctively? Has the discipline we have attempted to introduce into it had a great effect on these savages? Or is it reserving its strength for a grand *razzia* of lovely prisoners, and a meal off the most appetizing of them? Whatever may be the reason, not a soul strays from the line of march we mark out in advance; there is no quarrelling; the natives and their dwellings are alike respected. We are indeed glad of it; let the battle come—we have right on our side.

Of all the Monbuttoos, Munza, who ought to set an example of calmness and self-possession, is certainly the least tractable and the most excited. If it had not been for Madame de Guéran, who is occupied incessantly in soothing him, he would already have burnt a village or two, and massacred a goodly number of natives. His inaction weighs upon him, the unknown unnerves him, the utter silence and void around us, which are day by day becoming more marked, make him uneasy. He longs, even at the risk of imprudence, to emerge from out the profound night in which we now are. As soon, too, as he again saw Madame de Guéran, who is regaining her strength, as soon as he could be by her side, and she could speak to him, his

insane passion appeared to return in all its strength.

Good heavens, what a situation! If we are attacked and conquered by the Walindis, it is death! If we are victors, we shall have to fight another battle with Munza to regain our freedom—and we have armed him against us! Eighty of his picked men are in possession of rifles and revolvers, all his troops have now some idea of fighting, and he is in a position to command them. We have taught him all we know! De Morin imparted to me, in confidence, these fears and, heaven knows, I share them.

Delange continues to deplore, very cheerfully all the same, the filial affection of Dr. Desrioux, which led to his taking that loving son's place. But, above all, he envies Pommerelle who, after having risked his life once as far as Monaco, has not hit upon the happy idea of journeying two thousand leagues farther to bring us reinforcements and cigars.

"He is a selfish egotist," says Delange. "He prefers whispering soft nothings into the ear of that questionable flame of his, who will hook him in the end! And he will have missed seeing Ulindi! A country of adorable, but unapproachable women!"

Miss Poles utters no sound; her thoughts, her regrets, and her amorous despair drive away all fear. She is marching on to death with

her eyes shut. Perhaps she courts it! Without Kadjoro, life is wearisome!

Joseph, on the contrary, is fully alive to the situation, and protests as vehemently as his fat will allow him to do. But de Morin disposes of him very quickly by informing him that he is quite at liberty to return alone to the Rue Taitbout.

December 11th.—About five o'clock this morning I left my tent to look about me. Large, confused bodies of people are moving on the rising ground which surrounds us on every side. The army of the Walindis has taken advantage of the night to advance towards us, and is now endeavouring to close in upon us.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The journal of the European expedition comes to an abrupt close on the 11th December. That is to say, the notes taken by M. Périères are so concise that they are not sufficient for the exigencies of our tale. In order to give a more detailed account of the events which followed on each other with such rapidity, and hastened the *dénouement* of this lengthy history, we have had recourse to certain information subsequently obtained from those who were best qualified to enlighten us.

M. Périères, as soon as he had satisfied himself about the appearance of the army of the Walindis, hurried himself off to warn MM. de Morin and Delange.

"Bravo!" said the latter. "This style of thing is much more to my taste. There will be an end of the business now."

"We shall be attacked at sun-rise," said de Morin. "That is the way the black tribes, when they make war, love to salute that luminary. Quick, let us rouse the camp and to arms!"

"Then you do not see," asked Périères, "any

means of avoiding this battle, which threatens to be a terrible one?"

"I see nothing but fighting for it," replied M. de Morin. "And it is not for want of thinking, I can assure you, because, for a long time, I have foreseen what has come to pass this morning."

"Suppose we send a flag of truce to the Queen?"

"She will receive it with a flight of arrows, and, besides, what are our envoys to say to her?"

"They can say that the army of the Monbuttoos has not been guilty of any excesses in the territory of the Walindis, that it has respected both the inhabitants and their property, that it has behaved more like an ally than an enemy, and that it makes fresh proposals for an alliance."

"Well! I agree to a last attempt, but only on condition that we send our own proper ambassadors. As white men, we may possibly have some influence. But if we are attacked *en route*, if we are killed before we can reach the Queen, or if we are taken prisoners, for we must not place too much reliance on her forbearance, or on her respect for flags of truce—you will admit that, will you not?—what will become of Madame de Guéran, of our caravan, of Munza, and of his army without us?"

"In fact," said the doctor, "the presence of

both of you is not only precious in the extreme but also indispensably necessary, for your death or disappearance would spread discouragement through the ranks of the Monbuttoos and the Nubians. But I am not so generally necessary. I could die or be made prisoner without any very great inconvenience, and I offer to make my way to Walinda alone. Oh! don't go into raptures, you may postpone your admiration. At this moment my prevailing feeling is curiosity. I have for a long time been burning with a desire to find myself face to face with this lovely Queen, whose godfather I am, seeing that I have christened her with the name of Venus in ebony. I want, and speedily too, to see her beauty for myself, because one of our bullets may disfigure my godchild at any moment, and convert a pretty woman into a mere corpse. I will therefore set out alone and unarmed; that will be the more prudent course. So let us find out with our telescopes where she is, for I confess to not relishing the idea of searching for her through the ranks of that vast army."

MM. de Morin and Périères did not attempt to turn the doctor from his purpose. Being themselves quite capable of acting as he was doing, they considered his conduct as perfectly natural. Though they did not expect very much from their friend's proceedings, they yet felt that some attempt ought to be made to

obviate the frightful massacre, the wholesale butchery that was on the eve of taking place. They gave Delange no instructions whatever, not quite knowing what to tell him to do, and relying on that intelligence and imperturbable coolness of which he had so often given such proofs.

Whilst the bearer of the fresh flag of truce was quietly making his way towards a hillock about five hundred yards distant, lighted up by the earliest rays of the rising sun, and seeming to be the central point of the line of battle arrayed against us, MM. de Morin and Périères, without loss of time, carried out a plan they had just hit upon.

The ground upon which they had passed the night, and which in all probability was destined to serve as the battle-field, resembled a large, oblong amphitheatre, surrounded on the north, east, and west, by gradually sloping hills, and shut in, on the south, by a mountain about eighteen hundred feet high.

Périères had conceived the idea of resting the army against this last mentioned rampart, and cutting a deep trench in front of it. Thanks to this plan of defence, the Walindis would not be able to surround their enemies, as would have been the case had the latter remained in the centre of the open plain. At the same time, the European caravan and a portion of the Monbuttoo army would be protected by a fortifica-

tion where, should they not succeed in defeating the Walindis, they might make a last desperate stand.

Whilst the soldiers and bearers, and, indeed, everybody who was capable of wielding an axe or tearing up the ground with his hands, were working for the common safety, de Morin was engaged in a careful survey of the mountain which rose up before him.

"What a nuisance it is," said he, "that this splendid wall is insuperable! If we could only get past it we could save ourselves without having to strike a blow, we could escape from the territory of the Walindis, and gain Lake Albert."

"Let us blow it up," replied Périères, laughing. "It is very likely stopping up the mouth of some extensive pass."

"My dear fellow," said de Morin. "I labour under a very decided impression that very soon we shall find another, and a better use for our powder."

The doctor was, meanwhile, composedly continuing his walk across the plain alone and unattended. He had been asked to take Nassar with him, but he distinctly refused, on the ground that if he saw the Queen he should see M. de Guéran also, and that he preferred having the Baron as interpreter.

He was not mistaken; his fellow countryman came to his rescue. Received at first by a

heavy shower of arrows, Delange soon noticed that the missiles became fewer and farther between. They ceased at last altogether, and when he was about a hundred yards from the group he was attempting to reach, some one stepped forward and came to meet him.

CHAPTER XIX.

It was a man about forty years of age, tall, thin, and with a slight stoop. Despite his sunburnt skin, unkempt hair, long beard, and the tattered garments which barely covered him, you could tell from the whole contour of his face, his marked and aristocratic features, and his general bearing, that you were face to face with a man of birth and breeding.

He walked towards Delange, and, raising a cap, saved from the general shipwreck of his belongings, he said in French and in a broken voice—

"You, sir, are a member of that expedition which has so generously devoted itself to searching after me?"

"I am," replied the doctor, as he also uncovered, "for I presume I have the honour of addressing the Baron de Guéran?"

"Yes, I am, indeed, the Baron de Guéran, though," he added with a slight smile, "my dress might lead you to doubt that assertion. And now, may I in turn enquire to whom I am speaking? I must needs know your name, if only that I may ever cherish it in my memory."

"Dr. Delange, a Frenchman, and a Parisian."

"And your friends?"

"M. de Morin and M. Périères."

"Thank you; those names are graven on my heart. But permit me to come straight to the point without further delay, for time presses. It has been a difficult matter to obtain even this short interview with you. In spite of my advice you have persisted in your idea of rescuing me. Well! I should, perhaps, have done the same in your place. But what is your present object, and why have you ventured here alone?"

"I want to see the Queen, and, through your mediation, make proposals of peace to her, so that, if possible, we may avoid a bloody battle."

"You will not succeed, for the Queen is furious against the Monbuttoos for having invaded her territory, and in her anger she mixes you up with her enemies. For the last fortnight, ever since she was warned of your arrival in Ulindi, she has been eager to come to blows. The whole tribe is equally anxious; her sorcerers and fetish-mongers have declared in favour of war, and preach it as the crusades used to be preached in olden days, and I, alas! am powerless to ward off from you the evils which menace you."

"But," asked the doctor, "is it, as you wrote, absolutely necessary that we should be conquered?"

"Yes, I believe so firmly. The force at Walinda's disposal is considerable. Ah! you will do me justice at least," added M. de Guéran, seizing the doctor's hand. "I have done all in my power to prevent your coming here—and now, I cannot even fight by your side!"

"What?" asked Delange. "Are you not coming over to us?"

"Coming to you? Would I not have been with you already if I could have managed it? Turn your head, and look at that band of women who are watching our slightest movement. They are not more than a hundred yards from us. If I make one step in advance, if I were to pass the limits laid down for me, if I were to attempt to approach your camp, at that very moment my gaolers would rush upon us, and would, after they had killed you, take me back to the Queen. Come, there is yet time, let my friends desist from all endeavours to save me; let them cross the frontier once more. Perhaps I may induce the Queen to let you go without attacking you."

"Your advice is impracticable. The King of the Monbuttoos is bent on a trial of strength with Walinda, and we should never persuade him to beat a retreat. If the Queen persists in refusing him an interview and an alliance, he will attack her before she has time to attack him."

"She will refuse, just as she has already done."

"Then a battle is inevitable."

"Inevitable, as you say."

"And it means defeat and death for us?"

M. de Guéran bowed in silence. Then M. Delange said in a clear, distinct voice, dwelling upon each word—

"You know that we have two white women with us?"

"Yes, so the Queen told me. They are your wives, doubtless. You are travelling after the fashion of my old friend Livingstone, and as Baker was travelling when last I saw him."

"You are mistaken," said Delange, abruptly. "We are travelling with the Baroness de Guéran, your wife."

"My wife! my wife here!" stammered the Baron. "It is impossible—impossible."

"I give you my word," interrupted Delange, "that I have spoken the truth."

"The truth! the truth! She is there—my wife is there!" said M. de Guéran, over and over again, as if he were stupefied or had lost his head completely.

"Yes," continued Delange, "Madame de Guéran is not more than three hundred yards from you, at the foot of that mountain, in the midst of that army yonder."

"How could she have travelled so far? How has she had the courage—I do not understand, I—"

He stopped, his emotion overcoming him. The doctor came to his rescue.

"She arranged," said he, "an expedition of which I and my friends have the honour to be members, and this expedition has been searching for you during the last fourteen months."

Suddenly M. de Guéran, who had been leaning on the doctor's shoulder to prevent himself falling, drew himself up, and exclaimed—

"I must see her! I must see her! Let them kill me—what do I care? I must see her, I tell you! Come! Come!"

He seized hold of Delange, who, seeing the danger, tried to restrain him.

But, hardly had the pair stirred a step, than a hundred amazons rushed at full speed towards the Frenchmen, overtook them, and, without any violence, without even touching them, formed a circle, three deep, round them.

It was impossible to break through this living zone, this three-fold wall of flesh bristling with iron points, for all these amazons were in their war-paint.

M. de Guéran had by this time recovered his self-possession to a certain degree.

"You see," said he to the doctor, "that I have not deceived you. I am a prisoner, and," he added, pointing to the amazons, "I have some terrible gaolers. But here comes the Queen, time presses, listen to me—I will persuade Walinda that I did not wish to escape

with you. I will ask and obtain your liberty. But that is all I can do. Do not attempt to speak to her, or to make any proposals for peace; that would only be a confession of weakness and fear. Moreover, she is no longer at liberty to avoid war; her army is in too great a state of excitement. Return to your people — to mine, as soon as you can. You will be attacked without delay. Defend yourselves, fight, try, above all things, to keep the enemy at a distance; avoid, as far as possible, a hand to hand struggle. These women are terrible when once they get at and seize hold of their foes. As soon as the fight begins I shall be more at liberty, and less strictly guarded. My gaolers and the Queen herself will forget all about me in the fury of the battle. The smell of blood will intoxicate them. I will take advantage of that moment to join you. If I die, I shall die near you, by her side. Here is the Queen."

Walinda advanced, grave, calm, majestic, and surrounded by a fresh guard. The circle opened to let her pass, and, without taking the least notice of Delange, she marched straight up to her prisoner, questioned him sharply, and entered into conversation with him.

Whilst this was going on, the doctor scanned her closely. He had nothing better to do, and this is what he says about her—

"What ease in all her movements! What

grace and strength combined! Yes, she is a Venus, a marvellous bronze statue moulded by a great sculptor, but a living statue, overflowing, indeed, with life. And what an expressive head, so full of character, is placed on this lovely body! Long hair, black as jet, despising the fashion of the country, and free from any trammels, covers her shoulders and hangs down to her waist like a silken mantle; a broad, square forehead without a single wrinkle; a warm complexion, verging on copper-colour, like that of an Indian half-caste; fine, almond-shaped eyes, at one moment soft and languishing, at another cruel and determined. Eyes which can weep, or fascinate, or look you down; a nose delicately rounded, and with nostrils which quiver at the slightest emotion; small, even, sharp teeth, showing the brilliancy of their whiteness behind the pouting, ruddy lips; and a smile wherein cruelty and tenderness are curiously blended. I have never seen anything, and I never shall see anything so picturesque and so lovely; dazzled by her beauty and entirely lost in the contemplation of it, I absolutely forgot all about my very dangerous situation."

Did the Queen read this admiration in the eyes of the doctor as she looked at him for a moment? Was she flattered, and disposed to show him the mercy for which M. de Guéran pleaded so eagerly, or did she say to herself

that she might very well let him go away, seeing that in a very short time, when the victory should be hers, he would once more be in her power? The doctor did not attempt to settle these knotty points; moreover, he had no time. A breach was made in the human wall surrounding him, and Walinda, stretching out her arm, motioned him to withdraw.

He was simply shown the door without having had a single word addressed to him. He thought it better not to raise any objection, so he eyed the Queen from head to foot for the last time, so as to impress her form on his memory, exchanged a look with the now impassible Baron, and withdrew, staring in the coolest manner at the women who were ranged on either side of him.

A quarter of an hour afterwards, still under the influence of all that he had seen, he rejoined his friends. They had employed their time during his absence to good purpose, having surrounded their post by a ditch, a hundred yards long by one deep, starting from the foot of the mountain, and describing a semi-circle round them. The earth dug out from this ditch and thrown up on both sides of it, formed an embankment, which would serve as a protection from the arrows, and would render an assault difficult, if it did not actually prevent it. Trunks of trees, stones, all the baggage of the caravan, and the *débris* of the previous

night's encampment, were also piled up here and there, like detached forts. One of these barricades, constructed with more care than the others, and forming an inner circle within the ditch, was intended as a shelter for Madame de Guéran, her servants, the sick, and, later on, for the wounded.

At each end of the semi-circle were posted two battalions, commanded by Munza's best officers, and held in readiness to advance against the enemy. The King, at the head of a third body, was in reserve, to reinforce whichever portion of the army might most need his assistance. The Europeans, Nubians, Dinkas, and the eighty Monbuttoos armed with rifles, were destined to repel assaults, and were not to leave the main enclosure, where Périères and the two Arab interpreters undertook to restrain them and direct their movements.

De Morin was with Munza as commander-in-chief, and Nassar acted as their interpreter and aide-de-camp.

Under the pretext that amongst the Walindis the women fight, Miss Poles was anxious to take her share of the common danger. She had got herself up in a fancy costume, half-civil, half-military, held a lance in one hand, and her inseparable revolver in the other. She might have passed for an amazon, strictly speaking, if she had been more sparing of clothing and a little better made—"only a little," as

Delange politely said. Stiff and motionless, at a barricade constructed by Madame de Guéran's orders, she was extremely like a sign-post or a figure intended to frighten away the birds.

Joseph, alone, had not offered his services in any way. He pretended to be suffering from a renewed attack of fever, and moaned in a corner of the inner circle, behind a third barricade constructed by himself for his own private use; his saddle-ox, near which he was reclining, was also capable of acting as a last line of defence.

The army of the Walindis was set in motion about 7 a.m., when compact masses were seen simultaneously descending from the rising ground, debouching on to the plain, and advancing directly against the entrenched camp we have described.

By the aid of the telescope, de Morin ascertained that the advancing force was composed of male troops only. Walindi, husbanding her strength, was holding her amazons in reserve until the time should come to strike a decisive blow.

When about three hundred paces from the camp, the Walindi archers shouted vigorously, drew their bows, and let fly their arrows. Not one of them reached the mark. Perceiving their want of success, they advanced another hundred paces in tolerably good order, and discharged a second flight; some passed over the camp and

broke against the mountain side, whilst others were embedded in the sand, which formed a sort of bolster round the ditch.

"I declare, on behalf of all of us," said de Morin, turning to the Europeans, "that up to to-day we have done no wrong to this tribe, and that it is about to attack us. We, from this moment, have a right to act in self-defence, and that right we will exercise."

He exchanged a few words with the King; the latter gave the word of command, and the arrows of the Monbuttoos winged their way through the air. The aim was true, and the ranks of the Walindis were thrown into disorder.

This first blush of success caused Munza to lose his head. Eager to fight, chafing at the inaction to which he had been so long condemned, he could not content himself with decimating the hostile battalion at long range by means of arrows, but rushed out against them followed by his small *corps d'armée*.

The first shock was terrible, for both sides had long yearned to come to close quarters, and eat each other!

Thrice the Walindis, who were fighting under the eyes of the amazons and wanted to gain the day without their assistance, succeeded in driving the Monbuttoos on to their entrenchment; thrice were they in their turn compelled to fall back.

The Europeans could take no active part in this strife. The *mêlée* was too compact, and the combatants too close together; the bullets might easily have killed an ally or a friend.

Munza, armed with his battle-axe, bore himself like a hero of old Gaul, when hand to hand fighting was the fashion. Not yet quite recovered from his wound, and sometimes unable to stand up, he went on his knees from group to group, struck at the legs of his enemies, mowed them down with his axe, and reaped a goodly harvest round him. Sometimes he managed to stand upright, drawing his figure up to its full height and towering over friend and foe. Then he would cast a long, lingering look towards the European camp, as if seeking for some one, and, forgetting his wound, would hurl himself, with a fearful yell, against the enemy.

Suddenly a cry, more terrible than all that had preceded it, was heard, and the Monbuttoos were seen to break, and run in all directions.

The King had just been mortally wounded.

CHAPTER XX.

A BLOW from an axe had broken Munza's left knee, a lance head had penetrated deeply into his right side, and from these two wide, gaping wounds the blood flowed in streams. Nevertheless, the King fought on; he no longer attacked, but he defended himself, kept his enemies at a distance, and prevented their coming to close quarters to despatch him. Powerless to rise from the spot where he had fallen, his bleeding body scarce raised from the ground, he still wielded the battle-axe, so terrible in his hands, looked so ferociously at the Walindis, and uttered such fear-instilling cries, that he kept the space around him clear.

Little by little, however, the surrounding host closed in upon him; they knew that their prey could not escape them, but they were not in a hurry to fall upon him. They advanced slowly, cautiously, silently, ready to rush in the moment Munza showed any sign of weakness.

But now M. Périères, followed by the Monbuttoos armed with revolvers, hurried out of the encampment to the rescue of the wounded King. It was high time; Munza had made

such superhuman efforts to defend himself that his wounds had opened, and, weakened by loss of blood, he swooned upon the ground. Some soldiers lifted him up in their arms, whilst M. Périères and his little band kept at bay the maddened and yelling mob.

They succeeded in bearing the King within the enclosure set apart by Madame de Guéran for the sick and wounded. But Delange, after a moment's examination, saw clearly that this time his skill would be of no avail. They had not brought him a wounded man, but an already stiffening corpse, whose large eyes alone were open and rivetted on Madame de Guéran, who had just appeared on the scene.

Munza might, perhaps, have had strength enough left to speak to her and touch her; but he only fixed his eyes upon her and appeared well-content to die near her and for her. He had struggled heroically against his enemies, but he disdained to fight against death. He accepted his fate without a murmur, without reviling. This savage died like a Frenchman.

Madame de Guéran knelt down beside him, and, after having solemnly made the sign of the cross over him, laid her hand on his forehead. He shivered at her touch; his already closing eyes opened wide with a last effort, his face was lighted up with a smile of intense meaning, his lips moved, and in a long, deep sigh his soul fled away.

Laura de Guéran remained on her knees for a long time, praying to the God of the Christians to receive into His keeping the heathen soul which, lifted out of its former abasement, was in a state to expand into something far higher and better. She prayed, too, for all those friends who were fighting so valiantly in her defence, and for her husband, so near to her and yet so far removed, not by mere distance, but by the terrible obstacles lying between them.

Whilst she thus knelt beside the body of Munza, the Walindis came on again to recover from the Europeans the wounded man snatched from their vengeance. They did not know that he was dead, and they hungered after the pleasure of strangling him with their own hands, carrying off his body, casting it down at the feet of the Queen, and saying to her—"You see that we can fight as valorously as your women; your warriors are in no way inferior to your amazons."

Intoxicated by their first success, and thinking now that victory was within their grasp, they rushed in one huge, compact body against the encampment.

"Fire!" called out de Morin.

A hundred rifles volleyed forth their messengers of death; every bullet told on the mass; a hundred bodies fell, and the remainder, terrified and dismayed, recoiled as one man, and attempted to fly. But that was out of their

power; they now found themselves enclosed, cooped up, and penned in, so to speak, between their enemies and their friends.

The army of the amazons had moved down from the neighbouring hills on to the plain to reinforce the battalions already engaged. The latter, on turning to fly, consequently found behind them an impenetrable human wall, five thousand women, who reviled them as cowards, and threatened them with death if they retreated. Put thus to the blush, and in despair at flight being impossible, they attempted a fresh attack. They were received with a second volley, and another hundred of their number bit the dust.

But this time the fire was continuous, a never-ceasing storm of leaden hail, where every bullet found its billet. The Europeans saw clearly that if they ceased firing for a second, or if their line was broken at any one point by their countless enemies, it would be death, speedy, inevitable death!

The Walindis were now in utter confusion, fighting amongst themselves and killing each other. The front rank fell under the European fire; the rear-rank, borne backward, was hurled against the amazons, and suffered terribly from the sharp blades with which the bodies of these women were covered. The brutal terror which had taken possession of this human herd at length inspired them with an intelligent idea. They, suddenly, made a simultaneous rush

against the living barrier which shut them in, made a breach in it, and sped, through this opening, in haste and disorder across the plain.

Nothing now separated the Europeans from the army of the amazons. Five thousand women, bristling with iron and armed with axes and lances, five thousand raving maniacs, only awaited the word to assault the camp, defended by scarcely a hundred men.

"This time," said Dr. Delange, cheerfully, to his two friends, "I imagine that we shall see the end of all this, and a very good end, too. At all events, I am glad of it. We shall no longer have to say to each other every morning, 'Is this the day? Are we to be exterminated before or after sunset?' Now we are regularly in for it; in five minutes there will remain of our caravan only an agreeable memory—for the Walindis. What have we to complain of? We might have died of fever, which is a stupid sort of thing to do, or we might have fallen into the hands of the Bongos, Niam-Niam, or Domondoos, all very second-rate people, whereas we are going to die by the hands of those charming women. Only look at them! They are perfectly adorable! Here they come, on purpose that we may admire their pretty, graceful necks, their flashing eyes, their dear little noses, and kissable lips!"

The whole of the amazons were, indeed, advancing, but in hostile array and good order,

commanded by the Queen in person, who was in the centre of the front rank.

"Are you not going to give the word to fire?" said M. Périères to M. de Morin.

"I shall take very good care to do nothing of the kind," replied M. de Morin. "We have but one hope—that of frightening them by a general attack, and so throwing them into disorder."

"You are the commander-in-chief, but I do not think that these sweet creatures are to be daunted so easily."

"Nor I either, but we must do something."

"What have they done with M. de Guéran?" asked Delange. "I cannot see him, even with my telescope."

"The Queen," said de Morin, "no doubt thinks that it would be useless to expose so valuable a life, and has put her prisoner in some quiet corner."

Whilst he was saying these words, Madame de Guéran came out of the inner enclosure, and gravely, calmly, and almost smilingly, joined her three friends.

"Gentlemen," said she, "I am come to die with you."

She had barely finished speaking, when a loud shout came from the ranks of the Walindis, and those immediately around the Queen seemed to be thrown into disorder, as if they were fighting

amongst themselves. At length their ranks opened before a man, armed with an axe, which he was whirling furiously round his head. He walked backwards, with his face to his enemies, who followed and tried to surround him, but dared not strike him.

He had already accomplished about twenty yards in this manner, when he turned round towards the Europeans; his eyes sought those of Madame de Guéran, with whom he exchanged a long, lingering glance. Then, calling out to the three young men who were preventing her from rushing out to meet him, he exclaimed—

"Fire! Fire!"

"Our bullets may hit you," shouted de Morin.

"What matter! You are all lost if you hesitate a moment longer."

"Fire!" said de Morin.

As soon as the smoke had cleared away, everybody looked for M. de Guéran. He was no longer as he had been but a moment before, standing upright and formidable. The Queen had got up to him, and, whilst he hesitated, no doubt, to strike her, had thrown her arms round him, and borne him down to the ground, where she was stabbing him in a perfect fury with all the iron blades fixed to her neck, her arms and her ancles.

At the same time, the amazons, now beyond

Walinda's control, and undeterred by the dropping fire from the entrenchment, rushed altogether against the camp, and succeeded in effecting an entrance.

Fortunately for the Europeans, they had crossed the ditch to rescue M. de Guéran, and were consequently on the outside of the rampart. The Nubians, and a few Monbuttoos, had followed them, and now formed a forlorn hope, still capable of a sturdy defence. The amazons gave them a moment's breathing time; wholly occupied in killing the unfortunate wretches left in the camp, intoxicated with blood, frantic with rage, and half-mad, they had even forgotten their Queen, whom Nassar and three Dinkas, after a severe struggle, had managed to tear away from the mangled body she was hugging convulsively.

But a hundred victims were not enough to satisfy the ferocity of the amazons. As soon as they had massacred all the enemies they found within the entrenchment, they turned their attention to those who were outside.

Their numbers were still so great, that they completely filled the space between the mountain and the ditch; a second more, and they would have rescued their Queen, and butchered the Europeans and their surviving defenders.

But, suddenly, a fearful sound was heard—the mountain seemed to open out—rocks and

immense blocks of granite rolled down its slopes; enormous stones, hurled high into the air, were falling on all sides; they crushed everything beneath them, inspired all around with terror, and either destroyed or dispersed the remnant of the army of the amazons.

CHAPTER XXI.

In the first chapter of this volume, we left Dr. Desrioux and the the Count de Pommerelle in readiness to leave Paris. They embarked at Marseilles, on board the very steamer which, six months previously, had conveyed their friends, but instead of stopping at Suez, as the de Guéran expedition had done, they went right down the Red Sea, through the straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, as far as Aden.

Accident furthered their desire to travel as quickly as possible. Without being obliged to land at the port of Aden, they found at Steamer-Point, a large open roadstead, where the mails for India and China put in for a few hours, a vessel just leaving for Zanzibar. Their passage was at once secured on board this ship, their baggage was transhipped, and very soon they were steaming through the Gulf of Aden.

Doubling Cape Gardafuin they emerged into the Indian Ocean, coasted along the barren and desert shore called the Somauli, crossed the equator, and at the end of April, 1873, landed on the island of Zanzibar.

In order to allow our readers to follow us,

we must recall to their recollection that the caravan of Madame de Guéran, after having travelled for more than twelve months towards the south-east, had halted, on the 11th December, 1873, in front of the Blue Mountains, in lat. 2° N., long. 27° E. To come up with it, MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle were consequently obliged, on leaving Zanzibar, to take a north-westerly direction, and to traverse nine degrees of latitude, that is to say, about two hundred and twenty-five miles, without taking into account the longitude, which, of course, makes the journey longer, seeing that it cannot be in a direct line.

Dr. Desrioux and the Count de Pommerelle were neither geographers, nor even explorers, strictly speaking. The former had but one idea—to reach Madame de Guéran as soon as possible. He neither saw nor thought of anything but her, and until he found her, he could pay no attention to countries, people or things. He was a traveller for love ; he needed no compass ; his instinct and the cherished desire of his heart guided him to his single point of attraction.

As for M. de Pommerelle, the drawing-room traveller, the ardent, but latent, explorer, as soon as he commenced to soar, as soon as his yearning, so long restrained, burst forth, he was carried away by his new life. He was like a prisoner just released, or a school-boy in the

holidays, a reformed coward, to use his own expression, who had at last made up his mind to fight. Forward! was his continual cry, and he never wanted to stop. He filled his lungs with the novel air which surrounded him; he scanned with all his eyes, and admired with all his heart, the scenes which unfolded themselves before him.

Travellers like MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle are of no possible use to learned societies. They took no notes, and we have no means of getting at their ideas, or of giving, from their standpoint, even a bird's-eye view of the strange countries through which they passed. But earnest travellers, both before and after them, have followed the same route, and have, fortunately, left behind them records easy of access. To the works of Burton, Speke and Grant, Livingstone and Stanley we must refer our readers for the information withheld by MM. Desrioux and Pommerelle. A persual of these works will give the reader an idea of the interest attaching to this portion of the African continent. We are now going briefly to describe the journey of this pair, and to fill up the gap left by them, as we have already said, from information derived from more reliable sources.

Bent upon joining the de Guéran expedition as soon as possible, and determined to spare neither strength nor money to attain that end,

MM. Desrioux and Pommerelle, owing to the assistance rendered them by the Sultan of Zanzibar, and the European Consuls, were enabled in a few days to get together a caravan of considerable size. It consisted of *paguzis*, or bearers, freed slaves, in number about two hundred, under the leadership of a native guide (*kirangozi*), and an escort of sixty Belucks, enlisted voluntarily, and of the Bashi-Bazouk, or dare-devil class, commanded by a jemadar (lieutenant), and armed with first-rate rifles, bought by M. de Pommerelle in Paris just before leaving.

These preparations completed, our two friends sailed across to Bagamoyo, on the mainland, whence they started on the 15th of May.

CHAPTER XXII.

In former days, the name Zanzibar, or Black Country, was applied indiscriminately to the coast, the island, and its capital; now the term is used on the spot for the capital only. The island is called Kisikuja, and the coast rejoices in a variety of appellations, the most common being Zanguebar, M'rima, and Sohouahil.

The population on the coast, composed of a mixture between the Mussulman, the negro and the Arab, is nominally subject to the Sultan of Zanzibar, but is really independent. The men, as a rule, are yellowish brown; they wear round their loins a cloth reaching half-way down the thigh, and, when they appear in public, are invariably armed with a sword, a lance, or, at all events, a stick. To possess an umbrella is the height of their ambition, and, under the shade of this highly prized luxury, they may be seen rolling barrels on the shore.

The women wear a kind of frock, covering them from the shoulder to the ancles, necklaces of sharks teeth, and ornaments of the leaves of the cocoa-nut, wooden discs, or betel nuts in their ears, the lobes of which are abnormally

large. The left nostril is pierced by a silver or copper pin, and the hair, covered with sesame oil, is coiled up on each side of the head, like a bear's ears, or in some cases, appears in the guise of "heart-breakers," small and very round twists.

Savage customs are still in vogue amongst this community, more Arab than negro. For example, an uncle has an indisputable right to sell his nephews and nieces; and, if a European ventures to express his astonishment at such a custom, he is met at once with the remark—

"You would not have a man suffer from want so long as his brothers and sisters have children?"

The vast territory through which we are about to travel in the society of MM. de Pommerelle and Desrioux, obtaining our information, however, from their predecessors, especially from Burton, may be divided into several zones. The first of these extends over about a hundred miles, from the shore of the Indian Ocean, to the mountains of Usagara. Deep streams, lofty forests, and masses of foliage covering the gigantic trees lend to this region, in certain places, the appearance of a park; the cultivated fields are numerous, and every village is hidden in the grass or brushwood. Vegetation, under the influence of the damp but warm atmosphere, is more than usually luxuriant; the grass grows to the

height of twelve feet, with stalks as thick as a man's finger, and there is no straying from the paths worn through these jungles.

The second zone, a region of hills and forests, commences at the mountains of Usagara, and extends to the province of Ugogo, the native caravans, when not too heavily laden, traversing it in about three weeks. The shades of colour amongst the inhabitants vary considerably, ranging from almost black to chocolate. The men envelop themselves in a large piece of dark blue cotton stuff, or drab calico; the women, if wealthy, wear the *tobé*, a garment four yards long, which passes under the arms, crosses the chest, and is brought round the body to be fastened at the hip. The poor women wear a petticoat made of some skin and a species of breast-piece, tied round the neck and reaching to the waist. Both men and women are usually very ugly, but tall and vigorous, and, in spite of their frank and open countenances, they are nothing better than a set of freebooters, ever ready to spoil the smaller and weaker caravans.

The third zone extends as far as Kazé, and comprises the vast territory, a hundred miles square, known under the name of Ugogo. Its general aspect is arid and monotonous in the extreme. In several parts the soil is condemned to everlasting drought, water being found only in the large pits dug by the natives. Wild

beasts, such as the hyæna, leopard, zebra, elephant, and giraffe, as well as ostriches, abound here, and caravans enter this region in fear and trembling.

On the frontier of Ugogo is a desert, several miles broad, commonly called the Wilderness. Burton suffered terribly there, but Cameron says that the country has improved, the inhabitants having made and cultivated extensive clearings, and having also succeeded in finding water.

MM. de Pommerelle and Desrioux, who crossed this district at the same time with the English naval officer, reaped the advantage of this improvement. In fact, it was just as they were emerging from the Wilderness, at the beginning of July, that our two travellers overtook Cameron, who, although he had left Zanzibar six weeks before they did, had not been travelling nearly so fast. The famous explorer, then on the eve of his three years' journey, was still in good health, and had not yet been attacked by the wasting fever and inflammation in the eyes which caused him so much suffering a few months later on.

MM. de Pommerelle and Desrioux questioned Cameron, just as they had done two months previously the Consuls at Zanzibar, on the subject of the de Guéran expedition, but he could not give them any information. It became very evident that their friends had not

yet reached these parts, either from want of time, or because they were detained farther northward, or—they might no longer be alive. The Count and the doctor hurried on.

Next to the territory of Ugogo comes the country of the Moon, of which Kazé is the most important point. Kazé is in the south what Khartoum is on the Nile and in the north, the depôt or rendezvous for caravans either going to or coming from the interior. The inhabitants of this town, mostly Arabs, live in great comfort, almost magnificence; their houses, though of only one storey, are large and solidly built; their gardens are extensive and tastefully laid out, and they receive regularly from Zanzibar, not only what is necessary for life, but also a quantity of luxuries. They are surrounded by a host of slaves, in proper liveries, and use the Zanzibar donkeys as steeds.

When they reached Kazé, MM. de Pommerelle and Desrioux had already traversed more than six hundred miles in less than three months. They would have dearly liked to have gone on without stopping, but they were compelled to give way to the laziness of their bearers, and the prevailing custom which prescribes for all caravans a halt of at least six weeks. In the country of the Moon several letters, written by Dr. Desrioux to Europe from Kazé, record, however, that this period, owing to a display of great firmness, several presents and a formal

promise of more, was curtailed more than one-half.

Towards the middle of August, the European caravan set out from Kazé in the direction of Lake Victoria. Just as Madame de Guéran and her companions, after having met, on the banks of the Nile and as far as the Bahr-al-Gazal, with almost presentable people and manners, found themselves face to face with barbarians, so MM. de Pommerelle and Desrioux, when they left the sea coast and bent their steps northwards, had to say adieu to everything savouring of European customs.

CHAPTER XXIII.

After leaving the country of the Moon and accomplishing a few stages through the neighbouring districts, the caravan of MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle reached the valley of Uzinza, surrounded by mountains covered by a luxuriant vegetation, scaled the N'yamwara, some 5,000 feet above the level of the sea, and arrived at Karagué, formerly the residence of King Rumanika, so frequently mentioned in the travels of Speke and Grant.

The Europeans for six weeks followed the shore of Lake Victoria and in due course reached, at the northern end of the lake, the Uganda country, where, according to the latest accounts given by Stanley, the famous M'tésa still reigns.

This royal personage has produced such an impression upon more than one traveller that we cannot resist the temptation of quoting Captain Speke on the subject.

"No one," says this authority, "dare stand before the King whilst he is either standing still or sitting, but must approach him with downcast eyes and bended knees, and kneel or sit

when arrived. To touch the King's throne or clothes, even by accident, or to look upon his women, is certain death. When sitting in court holding a levée, the King invariably has in attendance women, Wabandwa, evil-eye averters or sorcerers. They talk in feigned voices raised to a shrillness almost amounting to a scream. They wear dried lizards on their heads, small goat-skin aprons trimmed with little bells, diminutive shields and spears set off with cock-hackles, their functions in attendance being to administer cups of *marwa* (plantain-wine).

"When the company has squatted before him the court is converted into one of assize. The officers bring forward the prisoners and give their evidence. At once the sentence is given, perhaps awarding the most tortuous, lingering death—probably without trial or investigation, and, for all the King knows, at the instigation of some one influenced by wicked spite. If the accused endeavours to plead his defence, his voice is at once drowned, and the miserable victim dragged off in the roughest manner possible by those officers who love their King, and delight in carrying out his orders.

"This expeditious justice despatched, M'tésa condescends to receive the presents of his subjects. Young virgins, the daughters of Wakungu, stark naked, and smeared with grease, but holding, for decency's sake, a small square

of mbugu at the upper corners in both hands before them, are presented by their fathers in propitiation for some offence, and to fill the harem. After having formed part of the harem they are distributed amongst the most trusted officers as rewards for distinguished services.

"I have now been some time within the court precincts, and have consequently had an opportunity of witnessing court customs. Amongst these, nearly every day since I have changed my residence, incredible as it may appear to be, I have seen one, two, or three of the wretched palace women led away to execution, tied by the hand, and dragged along by one of the body-guard, crying out, as she went to premature death, '*Hai Minangé*' (O my lord!), '*Kbakka*' (my king!), '*Hai N'yawo*' (my mother!) at the top of her voice, in the utmost despair and lamentation; and yet there was not a soul who dared lift hand to save any of them, though many might be heard privately commenting on their beauty.

"On the first appearance of the new moon every month, the King shuts himself up, contemplating and arranging his magic horns—the horns of wild animals stuffed with charm-powder—for two or three days. These may be counted his Sundays or church festivals, which he dedicates to devotion. On other days he

takes his women, some hundreds, to bathe or sport in ponds; or, when tired of that, takes long walks, his women running after him, when all the musicians fall in, take precedence of the party, followed by the Wakungu and pages, with the King in the centre of the procession, separating the male company from the fair sex. On these occasions no common man dare look upon the royal procession. Should anybody by chance happen to be seen, he is at once hunted down by the pages, robbed of everything he possesses, and may count himself very lucky if nothing worse happens. Pilgrimages are not uncommon, and sometimes the King spends a fortnight yachting on Lake Victoria; but whatever he does, or wherever he goes, the same ceremonies prevail—his musicians, Wakungu, pages, and the wives take a part in all."

A young Frenchman, M. Linant de Bellefonds, who was assassinated in these parts in 1875, was permitted by the King to accompany him in some of his numerously-attended promenades. To his account and that of Speke we may add the report of Chaillé-Long, who witnessed the execution of thirty persons by order of M'tésa, and these details are completed by the narration of Stanley, who affirms that the King is gradually becoming civilized, thanks to the frequent visits of Europeans. He is being trans-

formed, says Stanley, from a heathen to a Mahommedan, and has even some idea of Christianity. The American traveller is unwearying in his praises of his host, whose prepossessing countenance betokens intellect and amiability. He describes him as a coloured man, well brought up, who might have frequented the European courts, and there have acquired a certain elegance and ease of manner, combined with great knowledge of the world.

MM. de Pommerelle and Desrioux, like Stanley, appear to have nothing but praise to bestow upon M'tésa. In the month of September they quitted, without any obstacle being thrown in their way, the capital of Uganda, leaving to the eastward the celebrated Ripon Falls, which Speke affirms to be the real outset of the Nile. They then crossed an important river, the Kafoor, and proceeded in a direct line towards the north-west, reaching, in the month of October, M'Rooli, formerly the capital of King Kamrasi, who, for so long a time, detained Speke, Baker, and Lady Baker in his kingdom.

A fortnight after its departure from M'Rooli the caravan at length reached Lake Albert, or M'Wootan. From this point, thanks to notes, jotted down from time to time in a memorandum book, we are enabled to follow the

two travellers by the light of their own observations.

"There is nothing," exclaims M. de Pommerelle, "in the whole of this country so superb as the appearance of Lake Albert. At my feet lies a long, verdant line of reeds bathing in the blue, transparent water, and waving under the influence of a fitful breeze. In the horizon, a grand wall of mountains, half hidden by shifting vapour, and standing out azure blue in the sunlight and the distance. Rounded, wooded, green hillocks repose on the sides of this granite mass, a tropical vegetation descending its slopes and disappearing on the margin of the lake."

MM. de Pommerelle and Desrioux were not mistaken in supposing that the mountains before them were the Blue Mountains, closing the north-west route which they had, up to this time, followed so strictly, in accordance with the hints contained in the letter from M. Périères. If their friends had not strayed from their intended track they were bound to meet them on the other side of those mountains. But how were they to scale them, or cross the intervening lake?

For some time they made their way along the shore, and reached Magungo, in lat. 2° N., recognizing this harbour by the description given by Baker of it, and its adjoining falls, a thousand feet high.

These falls, situated about twenty-five miles from Magungo, were afterwards christened by Baker the Murchison Falls, and this name has been preserved by both Chaillé-Long and the Italian Gessi in the latest maps published by them, in 1875 and 1876 respectively.

And now we have come to a point where we must recall to our readers the conversation which took place between MM. de Morin and Périères and the interpreter Ali, after the latter had contrived to communicate with M. de Guéran. "The residence of Queen Walinda," said the Arab interpreter, "is situated at the foot of a lofty and insurmountable mountain. Behind that mountain (which M. Périères supposed was Mount Maccorly or M'Caroli) are other mountains still more lofty, so high that they are lost in the clouds. Their tops, so much of them as can be seen, are quite blue, and at night from within them is heard a loud noise similar to that which would be produced by many torrents falling together from a great height." Those, M. de Morin remarked at the time, are the falls discovered at the northern end of Lake Albert, at the same elevation as Magungo, and known as the Murchison Falls.

Some time afterwards, at the end of November, 1873, the expedition of Madame de Guéran came in contact with the Walindis, and, on the 11th of December, gave battle to their army.

MM. de Pommerelle and Desrioux, on their side, reached Magungo, on the eastern shore of Lake Albert, in November, and were then only separated from their friends by that lake and the mountains on its western shore.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle were detained during the greater part of the month of November in the harbour of Magungo. All their efforts were directed to crossing the lake, and that was precisely what they could not accomplish. Not only did they hesitate to entrust their baggage and themselves to the frail boats used by the natives, but they also found that they must resort to violence if they wished to procure an adequate supply of even those dangerous and unsatisfactory craft. The natives confounded our two travellers with the Arabs engaged in the slave trade in these parts, and suspected them of a desire to get possession of the neighbouring islands for the purpose of laying in a stock of slaves, and they declined to lend a hand in furtherance of that supposed object. Much precious time was consequently lost in negotiations and in attempts at arrangements which were settled at night only to be upset the next morning. As soon as the Europeans, weary of the delay and incessant disappointments to which they were exposed, proceeded to the beach and appeared determined

to lay violent hands on the boats, the nagara, or drum, summoned the natives to arms, and hosts of black people, armed with lances, responded to the call.

MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle were, nevertheless, bent upon crossing the lake at the particular point where they then were, because all the information which they could obtain led them to believe that it was narrower there than at any other part. The mountains directly in front of them seemed also less inaccessible than those lying farther to the south. On the other hand, if they were to proceed northwards along the shore of the lake, they would not only be getting away from their proper route, which lay north-west, but they would also find the Nile and the Murchison Falls barring their onward progress.

They finally came to the resolution to dispense with boats, and to construct for themselves large rafts or floats of timber. They would not, it is true, be able to steer these at will, but M. Desrioux had noticed that the cataract, in falling into the lake, displaced a large volume of water, and formed a current which seemed to run in the direction of the western bank. This current does not exist close in shore at Magungo, being noticeable only about two or three kilometers out in the open lake; the raft, however, by the aid of large poles, could easily be propelled through the

shallow water until it reached it. In addition to this, their progress would be facilitated by laying hold of the aquatic plants and the ambatch, growing in abundance close to the shore, and only ceasing at the edge of the current.

The natives would have opposed the construction of these rafts if they had suspected their object, but as they never felt very secure in their own canoes, they did not imagine for a moment that the Europeans would care about trusting themselves to trunks of trees fastened together with creepers.

The timber floats were finished in a few days, and, during the night of the 25th November, the baggage and provisions of the caravan were placed on board them. Every obstacle, however, was not yet swept away; the bearers (*pagazis*) refused to embark or to trust their precious lives to the one allotted to them. Fifty men only, born on the M'rima coast, accustomed to the Indian Ocean, and, therefore, not to be dismayed by Lake Albert, consented to follow their masters. As for the Beluchs, who were braver than the bearers, and had often made the passage from the island of Zanzibar to Bagamoyo, they made no objection whatever to taking their places on board one of the rafts, together with the two Frenchmen, their interpreters and guides.

The embarkation commenced towards mid-

night, and was not completed until 3 a.m. At sunrise the flotilla was not more than two miles from the shore, and had not reached the current. The natives, when they discovered this novel mode of putting out to sea, gave utterance to loud shouts, beat their drums, and lost no time in sending a perfect storm of arrows after the fugitives, who, by this time, were well out of range. A fleet of a hundred boats also put out in pursuit of the Europeans, but a few bullets soon caused them to turn tail and make for the shore again.

About 8 a.m., the water, which, up to that time had been of a blackish hue in consequence of the quantity of ambatch wood, became clearer; the floating islets of verdure, and the large aquatic plants disappeared gradually, and the force of the current began to make itself felt. Dr. Desrioux was not mistaken; the direction of the current set directly towards the western shore of the lake, which the expedition reached, without further obstacle, at noon, the strength of the stream preventing the reeds from taking firm root in the shallow water.

The landing, nevertheless, was a matter of considerable difficulty, for the wind had risen, and the waves uplifted the rafts, and dashed them against the shore, very rugged and broken at this point. At last a small, sheltering creek was sighted, and in it they eventually contrived

to take refuge. It was high time they did so, as, although it was not the rainy season, one of those terrible storms, so frequent on Lake Albert, burst upon them in all its fury. The natives on the other shore doubtless thought that the Europeans had been shipwrecked, and without delay gave themselves up to the celebration of an orgie in honour of that imaginary occurrence, an indirect victory for themselves, as they supposed.

The coast was entirely deserted, either because the natives had taken to flight on witnessing the arrival of the strangers, or because the sterility of the soil had long since driven away its former denizens. In fact, the only thing to be seen between the lake and the mountain, was a tongue of land, about a hundred yards broad, sandy and uncultivated, the trees which grew up the mountains and along their sides being too perpendicular to be of much account.

Nevertheless, the question of the hour was how to scale this lofty mountain chain. At first sight the ascent appeared impracticable, and M. Desrioux, in spite of all his courage, and the experience he had acquired in the Alps and Pyrenees, would possibly have hesitated to make the attempt, had it not been that amongst the escort there were some soldiers who were natives of the mountainous district of Usagara. Not only did these men make

light of the ascent, but they also laughed their less venturesome comrades out of all their fears. A few Beluchs, natives of the coast, and sworn foes to mountains in any shape, alone resisted both entreaty and ridicule. MM. de Pommerelle and Desrioux did not take this defection very much to heart, for they did not care about dragging the whole caravan with them on to the mountain tops, whither neither baggage nor provisions could be conveyed, or to regions, evidently uninhabited, where no food could be obtained.

Fifty men were ample for the attempt, and each one of this number was provided with a rifle, a lance to serve as an Alpenstock, an axe for pioneer purposes, a cord wound round the waist, and a linen bag or haversack, carried on the back, and containing provisions enough for several days. Cartridges and powder were also served out in equal proportions to every man.

The recalcitrant Beluchs and the few bearers who had mustered up courage to cross the lake, were left on the shore under the command of the jemadar. They were to await the return of the Europeans for the space of one month; that time past, they were at liberty to return to Zanzibar, where, on application at the Consulate, and on production of a certificate given to them by MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle, they would receive the wages agreed upon.

On the 28th November, at sunrise, fifty

Beluchs, after having embraced their comrades with that ardour and effusion natural to the entire black race, moved off in Indian file, and commenced the ascent. For the first two days it was not so difficult as had been anticipated. The forests through which the party passed, though sometimes an obstruction, were more often an assistance. Every trunk was a sort of fulcrum, and had the additional advantage of preventing all chance of falling backwards down the more precipitous places. The work was laborious and fatiguing, but frequent halts were made, and the novelty of the style of march, and the *rôle* of mountaineer which the negroes were playing, was a continual source of enjoyment to men easily amused, and naturally of a cheerful disposition.

Very soon, however, the ascent became more difficult and more dangerous ; vegetation disappeared gradually ; shrubs, too small to be of any assistance, succeeded to the trees ; huge masses of rock barred the way, and much time was lost in getting round them. The caravan, also, found itself completely isolated in these regions, just as a ship would be if far from land and in an open, unexplored ocean. Not only was there no trace of any habitation, but there was not even the faintest sign that a human foot had ever passed that way. The dwellers by the shores of the lake had evidently no liking for the mountain, and very possibly, some

superstition withheld them from penetrating into these regions.

On the 3rd of December, the instruments brought by Dr. Desrioux recorded an altitude of 1,800 metres above the level of Lake Albert. (According to Baker, the lake itself is 2,720 feet above the level of the sea). They were still far from having reached the topmost summits, which reared themselves up towards the west like a granite wall, and on that side completely shut out the horizon from view. After so much arduous exertion, were they perforce to be stopped by these last obstacles, and compelled to retrace their steps without even having a bird's eye view of the countries hidden from their sight only by a curtain of stone?

During one of their halts, Dr. Desrioux observed that a mountain, which up to that time had been lost in the clouds, but had then just emerged from its veil, was flat at the top, and had for its summit a plateau instead of a point. He determined to reach this lofty spot, whence, even if it did not prove to be the highest point, he could, at all events, obtain a view of the western slope of the mountain.

The escort would have only been a source of delay in an ascent of this kind; six men furnished with ropes and lances were quite sufficient for his purpose. He selected the strongest and most daring, and begged M. de Pommerelle,

who for some time past had made light of every obstacle, and was now anxious to accompany him, to do nothing of the kind, but await his return with the remainder of the escort.

He made his arrangements in the evening, and started at the first glimmer of daylight on the 4th of December. After heroic exertion, he reached his goal about two o'clock in the afternoon, and was at once rewarded for his trouble. He found a vast plateau which, as he says in his notes, may be likened to the fort of Venasque, in the Pyrenees. Instead of having France to the north, and Spain to the south, he saw on the eastern side, Lake Albert, the Murchison Falls, and Magungo ; on the western, several ranges of mountains, less lofty than the one he had ascended, and, behind these mountains, through the crevices and natural undulations in them, he beheld an extensive plain.

He was the first European—nay, possibly the first man who had ever reached the summit of the Blue Mountains, which, in this part of Africa, cut the continent in two and separate the western provinces from the eastern territory.

CHAPTER XXV.

The conquest just achieved by M. Desrioux in the dominion of science, had no effect on his pride. If he congratulated himself at all on his success, it was simply because he had managed to overcome one of the obstacles which, in his idea, separated him from Madame de Guéran. In a word, it seemed impossible to him that behind this last curtain of mountains, and in the vast and certainly inhabited plain stretching out before him, he could fail to obtain some news of the European caravan.

His heart beat high at the thought that down below him, at the edge of a forest, on the bank of a river, or in some unknown village, he might suddenly find himself face to face with Laura de Guéran. He would not admit for a moment, even to himself, that instead of having come southwards, she might have been obliged to return towards the north, or that she might have fallen a victim either to the climate or a savage attack. No; something told him that not in vain had he undertaken so long a journey, surmounted so many obstacles, braved so many dangers. If he were not near the longed-for

end, would his heart be beating as it did beat at that moment ? Would his gaze be rivetted so fondly on the sea of mountain and plain ?

Whilst his thoughts were thus straying and his eyes seeking to discover the land inhabited by Madame de Guéran, three of the men who had accompanied him made their way back in the evening to M. de Pommerelle, and handed him a note scribbled on a scrap of paper, and in this note M. Desrioux informed the Count of the success of the ascent, and begged him to attempt it, in his turn, on the following day, together with all the soldiers and escort. It could no longer be looked upon as dangerous, because the guides, whom he had sent to him, had already accomplished it, and consequently would be able to take the most direct road, and point out the dangerous places.

On the afternoon of the 5th of December the doctor, the Count de Pommerelle, and fifty men of the escort were together on the summit of the mountain, discovered and trodden for the first time by M. Desrioux.

The rest of the day was devoted to rest, and the recovery of the strength necessary for the long marches of the following days. But it was unanimously resolved that a fresh start should be made at daylight on the morrow, and that no further halt should be made except when some natural obstruction should render it a matter of necessity. As the caravan had with

it only provisions enough to last five or six days, it was bound to make every effort to reach an inhabited district as soon as possible. The keen air prevailing on the mountain tops, and the comparative cold felt by men accustomed to an unvarying temperature of 30° or 40°, imparted to them unwonted briskness and activity; they would be called upon for exertions which they would certainly have been powerless to make in the plain.

The descent at first was easy enough. M. Desrioux had employed his time, whilst waiting for the Count de Pommerelle, in making a careful survey of the neighbourhood, and was therefore able to act as guide in the earlier stages. But very soon, obstacles made their appearance; they had scarcely made their way down a precipitous incline than a fresh mountain obtruded its unwelcome presence and closed their road almost vertically. They must either make a long detour, or mark out a path for themselves above an abyss. The plain seen on the previous day was lost to view as soon as ever they left the plateau. The horizon now became contracted in the extreme, precipices, rocks, gorges, and lofty peaks succeeding each other in unbroken succession. It was like plunging into an inextricable labyrinth, and without a compass they would have been lost for ever.

The Beluchs began to murmur, complaining

of having been inveigled too far away from the coast, and saying that they would never see their own country any more. Sometimes they stopped and cried like children, and a dozen times a day they had to be reasoned with, entreated, and threatened by turns. On the 8th of December, at the first gleam of dawn, just as they received the order to move on, they one and all refused to budge an inch.

"As you please," said M. de Pommerelle, calmly, "I am going on with my friend and will leave you here. You will not have anyone to guide you, and in two days you will all be dead from starvation. Fools! Don't you see that to get back to the lake is ten times as far as to reach the country we are in search of?"

MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle suited the action to the word, and, leaving the escort, slowly ascended a hill in front of them. As they anticipated, half an hour had not passed away before all their men rejoined them, begging them to continue their leadership.

"Very well," replied the doctor, "but at the first show of resistance or sign of fear, we part and for ever. We shall leave you at night when you are asleep, and you will never be able to find us. If, left to yourselves, you manage to reach the coast, which is very doubtful, all your trouble will have been thrown away, be-

cause the Consul will refuse to pay you, and your Sultan, our friend, will have you punished for deserting us."

This forcible manner of reasoning touched the escort, their murmurs ceased and their courage revived.

On the 9th, they scaled another mountain, and the first soldiers who reached the top uttered shouts of joy, for in the horizon appeared the plain so long lost to view, an immense plain, surrounded by wooded hills, with a black, confused mass in the midst of it, a village no doubt. To reach this promised land a descent had to be made into a valley, and a corresponding ascent accomplished on the other side of it up a last mountain, comparatively speaking insignificant, which now alone stood in the way of the caravan.

M. Desrioux, when he had come up to the leading men of the escort, lost no time in scanning the horizon through his telescope, and he made out that an important village was situated on one of the sides of the plain. After a few moments he thought, also, that he could not only distinguish habitations, but groups of human beings as well.

"See what you can make of it," said he, handing the telescope to M. de Pommerelle.

"Yes," said the latter, "the black specks you point out to me appear to move and change their places—for all the world like an army of

ants making an expedition around their dwelling place."

"Your army of ants," replied M. Desrioux, "is in all probability an army of natives either fighting or making ready for battle. There is nothing very wonderful in that, for these countries are invariably at war."

The Beluchs were beside themselves with joy as soon as they heard about the village. They embraced each other, danced, jumped about, and, thinking that they had already reached their destination, imprudently consumed their last provisions. Consequently, they made no objection when ordered to resume their march; tired of slaking their thirst, as they had been doing for a week past, at the mountain streams, they were overjoyed at the prospect of indulging in banana wine, beer, or some other fermented liquor. They did not halt until seven o'clock in the evening, when night suddenly closed in.

On the following day, after a march of three hours, the expedition found itself, unexpectedly, at the entrance of a gorge which divided the mountain into two parts, each about three hundred feet high. The space left free between the two ridges of these cliffs appeared very practicable, and the party took this natural road, hollowed out in the rock, without hesitation. As far as they could judge, seeing that they were crossing this last mountain in its

breadth, that is to say from east to west, they were bound to emerge on to the plain recognized by them on the previous evening. They might also find themselves on the same level as this plain, for the pass they were in had a very steep incline, was of considerable extent, and at its entrance was not more than 1,500 feet high.

Everything, moreover, led to the supposition that the mouth of the gorge would soon be reached. The passage, sixty feet wide at its commencement, was now not more than fifteen feet at most, the mountain tops overhanging it being so close to each other that they almost touched; there was only one little bit of blue sky to be seen, and the road was more like a subterranean passage than an open path.

Suddenly, the guides who marched at the head of the party came to an abrupt halt, and shouted for their comrades. A general rush was made to them, and their consternation was readily understood.

The way was barred by an immense rock. At the very moment when the caravan seemed to be on the point of reaching its goal, a terrible obstacle started up before it.

All the Beluchs, after having mingled their lamentations with those of the guides, became silent and pressed round the Europeans, recognizing that the white men alone could extricate them from this fresh difficulty.

"What do you think of it, old fellow?" said M. de Pommerelle to the doctor.

"I think," replied M. Desrioux, "that this rock is impracticable. I have just been examining it attentively, and I cannot discover a single crevice or fissure, or any of those natural steps which sometimes enable one to climb up such a place as this. Our ropes, moreover, would not reach the top, and, if they did, we have no grappling hooks to fasten them there."

"At the same time you agree with me that this rock alone separates us from the plain?"

"There can be no question about that. The two mountains, or, rather, the two cliffs which shut us in come to an end here. Behind this rock the sky and the horizon are once more spread out. We have evidently been following the bed of an immense torrent, perhaps a cascade of considerable size, now dried up, lost to view, perhaps, for centuries past. This torrent, which in former times must have spread over the plain, one day dragged along with it this block of granite. The rock rolled on as long as the two cliffs would let it, and then it was brought to a sudden stop between them, hemmed in by the two walls."

"I am quite ready to accept your version," said M. de Pommerelle, "but it is not of much importance to us to know how the rock got here. It stops the way for us—that is the essential, as well as the mournful part of the

business. A few yards of granite in length and breadth imprison us. What are we to do? Shall we seek another route?"

"No. First of all, I have examined the mountain thoroughly, and I do not believe that there is another exit. Secondly, our men, already discouraged, would this time most assuredly decline to follow us."

"Are we then to go back by the way that we came, and find our way to the lake again?"

"Never—not at any price. We must pass this way by hook or by crook."

"How?"

"By blowing up the rock."

CHAPTER XXVI.

M. DE POMMERELLE could not disguise his astonishment. His eyes turned quickly to the immense block, he measured its height and depth in silence, a smile of incredulity meanwhile playing over his features. At last he turned to the doctor, and said to him—

"I suppose you have a secret store of dynamite or blasting powder?"

"Alas! no," replied M. Desrioux, "you know that well enough."

"In that case?"

"In that case I shall be reduced to have recourse to our ordinary powder."

"And you believe that it is powerful enough to—"

"I do not believe anything at all," interrupted the doctor, "I only hope—*voila tout.* If you, my dear fellow, have anything else to propose—"

"I should not be at all sorry, believe me," said the Count, completing the sentence, "but I have done my very best to think of something, and I have found nothing."

"That being so, do me the favour of not

crying out before you are hurt, and oblige me by at least discussing my very modest proposition."

"Let us discuss it by all means. What quantity of powder have you at your disposal?"

"A very respectable quantity indeed, nearly a hundred kilos."

"Something may be done with that."

"Very much may be done, I can assure you. Ordinary powder is quite as powerful as blasting powder, which is used solely on account of its being of a larger grain, and, consequently, slower of combustion. But our powder, notwithstanding its fine grain, has not lost any of its virtue in this sunburnt country, and, besides, it has been kept in hermetically-sealed tin canisters, so that I believe it to be in thoroughly good order. I will add, my dear Count, that when I said 'we will blow up the rock,' I was not speaking with strict accuracy. I do not pretend, even with a hundred kilos of powder, to send it up into the air like a sky-rocket. I hope merely to shake it violently, to give it a severe shock, and, as it is placed on an incline and nothing appears to be in its way on the side opposite to that where we now are, we may possibly succeed in displacing it or make a breach in it, and by that means open up a passage for ourselves."

"Enough, enough!" exclaimed M. de Pommerelle. "I begin to share your hopes. One

more objection, nevertheless—you have not noticed any fissure in this block, and we have no instrument wherewith to bore it; how, then, do you propose to introduce the powder?"

"You are quite right," replied the doctor, "in saying that there is not a single fissure on the face of it which would in any way assist us in scaling it, but, as you may see, there are at its base a number of small channels, if I may use the word. Come and lie down on the ground with me. Now, do you see them?"

"Yes, perfectly. Here is one running right through the rock; I can see daylight on the other side."

"Well, it is in that particular chink that we are going to introduce the powder."

"And how about igniting it? We have no more matches."

"The ropes we used in scaling the mountain will do instead. They are so dry that they will burn like tinder. We shall have to scatter a few grains of powder amongst the strands to revive their powers of combustion if they show any signs of languishing."

"You have an answer for every objection. Come along, and, as our minds are made up, let us to work."

"No, no! I will not undertake anything to-day. It is too late; darkness will soon set in, and, for this delicate operation, we need all the light we can get. Besides, I shall not be sorry

to have a whole night for reflection—I might possibly find some better means—"

"There is no chance of that."

"Holloa!" said M. Desrioux, laughing. "Who is convinced now? I should be playing a sorry part if I were to try to stifle the conviction I myself have brought about. Nevertheless, I must remind you that there is such a thing as prudence; our powder is too precious to be cast to the winds, unless from absolute necessity. If indeed, after having got across this rock, we could rely upon entering a friendly country, I should be the first to say that we might hold our ammunition cheap. But this part of Africa, into which we are about to enter so noisily, and with such *éclat*, excuse the joke, is utterly unknown to us. Judging merely from the glimpse we had of the plain yesterday, we shall drop into the middle of numerous and warlike tribes. Allow me, therefore, to counsel patience until to-morrow."

"Until to-morrow be it, then!" said M. de Pommerelle, closing the conversation.

The doctor summoned a Beluch, who acted as interpreter, and ordered him to tell his comrades that the white men had discovered a way of getting across the obstacle lying between them and the plain. The soldiers broke out into shouts of joy, which became less exuberant, and finally degenerated into murmuring when they learnt that nothing was to be done until

the following day. But they soon came to their senses; they stood, at this juncture, far too much in need of the Europeans to complain about them.

On the morrow, at 5 a.m., M. Desrioux went to rouse M. de Pommerelle.

"Well?" said the Count, as soon as he had all his wits about him. "What are we going to do? What have you discovered?"

"Nothing fresh, my dear fellow."

"Then we are bound for up aloft?"

"I hope so, eventually, but that, as you know, depends very much upon circumstances. What we have to do now is to send the rock there."

"I stand corrected, and, at the same time, ready for anything. Command me."

They were obliged to rouse the soldiers themselves, because, in order to avoid encumbering themselves with a mass of things, they had brought neither drums nor horns with them.

When the Beluchs received the order to make one single heap of all their provision of powder, they looked at each other in astonishment, collected together, and began talking in whispers.

"What is the matter with them? Why do they not obey?" asked M. Desrioux of the interpreter.

"They accuse you," he replied, "of having some sinister designs with regard to them, with wishing to leave them to their fate, and taking

away from them all means of defending themselves and resisting you."

The Doctor joined the group of Beluchs, and, with the aid of the interpreter, endeavoured to explain to them as clearly as possible what he intended to do. They did not understand him in the least; powder, in their idea, was put into a gun, and, when ignited, sent out a bullet. The idea of employing it in any other way had never occurred to them. The Doctor thought that experience would be a more satisfactory and efficient instructor than any argument, and so he took up a stone about the size of one of our Paris paving-stones, put a small quantity of powder under it, made a sort of match out of the rope, set fire to it, and awaited the result. In about a moment, to the profound consternation of the soldiers, who were looking on with wondering eyes, a report was heard, and the stone was shattered to pieces. They understood the whole business now; it was only a question of doing the same thing on a larger scale, and they were all ready to lend a hand.

When the powder had been collected in a heap, four men carried it close to the rock, and poured it into the fissure which sloped down at the same angle as the block of granite itself.

Suddenly M. Desrioux, who had been lying at full length with his ear close to the ground, directing the operation, got up hurriedly, and

addressing M. de Pommerelle, who was close to him, said—

"There is a battle going on in the plain, on the other side of this rock!"

"Nothing very wonderful in that," replied the Count. "Did we not come to the conclusion yesterday, through the medium of our telescopes, that an army was advancing towards the mountain? And did not you yourself say that battles are of frequent occurrence in this part of Africa?"

"Yes, undoubtedly," said M. Desrioux, who appeared very much agitated. "But, if I am right, this is no question of an ordinary fight between two hostile tribes; a European caravan must at this very moment be engaged in a struggle with the natives of the country."

"What makes you think so?"

"Lie down on the ground, put your ear to this chink, and listen."

The Count did so, and, after listening for a moment, got up again.

"I have certainly heard shots being fired," said he, "but there is nothing to show me that they were fired by Europeans. The Arab caravans and the slave-traders have firearms, just the same as ours."

"I tell you," exclaimed M. Desrioux, more and more excited, "that there are Europeans there, and that very possibly they are the friends we seek."

"What? Do you mean—"

"Why not? Are we not expecting to meet them every moment! Have not all our forecasts and calculations during the past eight months led us to this part of Africa? They are there, I tell you—I know it—I feel it! Madame de Guéran is there, I repeat, on the other side of that rock, and she is, perhaps, in imminent danger!"

His voice trembled, his eyes sparkled, and he seemed so thoroughly convinced of what he said, that the incredulity of M. de Pommerelle was in the end overcome.

"In that case," said the latter, "do not let us waste our time in talking; let us act. I do not share your conviction, but I do not see the least objection to continue what we have already commenced."

M. Desrioux at once resumed his place near the rock, and issued his final orders.

Half-an-hour afterwards, two-thirds of the powder had disappeared down the fissure in the rock, and the remaining third had been distributed afresh amongst the soldiers. If the operation, now being attempted, should succeed, they might, after having successfully fought against nature, be called upon to wage war against man, and prudence dictated their keeping a supply of ammunition in reserve.

The rope, manipulated according to the directions of the doctor, was laid so as to serve as a

slow-match, and all the escort were then told to get away as quickly as possible MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle took upon themselves the duty of igniting the slow-match, of keeping a watch on it as long as possible, and of staying by it to the last moment.

As the doctor had anticipated, the rope, when separated into its component strands, caught fire easily; at the end of a quarter-of-an-hour it was half consumed. The two travellers, after having ascertained that there was no danger of its going out, fed, as it was, and assisted by the grains of powder scattered here and there upon it, then thought that it was about time for them to retire to a place of safety.

Ten minutes elapsed.

Suddenly the sound of a terrific explosion was heard; the earth trembled, and the mountain shook—and then, silence reigned around.

Without exchanging a look or a word, MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle ran down the gorge in which they had taken refuge, and in a few moments reached the spot where they had before stationed themselves.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The rock was split into two nearly equal parts, exactly over the fissure where the powder had exploded. One of the blocks remained upright, resting against the side of the mountain, but the other, propelled by the severe shock and detached from the main body, had toppled over completely.

MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle saw, open before them, a large gap, three yards wide, without a single obstruction in it.

They took a few steps forwards, reached the spot where the granite block had stood for so many years, centuries perhaps, and came to a sudden halt.

The ground was giving way beneath their feet; they found themselves on the brink of an abyss some thirty yards deep; the plain was not on the same level as the road blocked up but a few moments previously by the rock.

But they went on, clinging to, and supporting themselves by the side of the mountain, and they then saw that the rock they had displaced not only opened out the horizon to their view, but also afforded them a means whereby they

might reach the country just exposed to their gaze. In fact, after having turned a somersault in the air, the top of the rock had fallen on to the plain, whilst its base, resting against the mountain, remained on the spot previously occupied by it. It was exactly like the floor of a bridge which has given away ; one of its sides remained fixed to the supports on the right bank of the river, the other was engulfed in the stream.

All the caravan had to do was to slide down an inclined plain of granite, thirty yards long. But, before committing themselves to this descent, and overcoming the very last obstacle which separated them from the plain, MM. Desrioux and Pommerelle looked around them, and were dismayed.

Nothing could be seen on the vast expanse before them but people running in terror in all directions ; naked women, raising their hands to heaven and hurrying away with rapid strides ; men jostling each other in utter confusion or, stupefied by fear and incapable of movement, throwing themselves down on the ground and seeking to bury themselves in it. The grass of the plain was strewn with arms of every description—lances, arrows, bows, and shields, cast away by the fugitives to render their flight more rapid. In the distance, however, were seen close, compact bodies of men, battalions reforming and being continually rein-

forced by the accession of stragglers. These soldiers belonged, no doubt, to the victorious army, who, having taken to flight at the commencement of the engagement, were now reappearing to rejoice over the victory of their comrades, and to plunder and massacre the enemies against whom the remainder of their force had so valiantly fought.

But when, after having scanned the distant horizon, MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle turned their eyes to the foreground of the tableau, their astonishment was converted into stupefaction.

A kind of entrenched camp, with a circular ditch round it, met their eyes. It must have been, a few moments previously, taken by assault, and its defenders put to the sword. More than three hundred dead bodies lay there; some on the ground, some on the sides of the ditch, and others on boxes and baggage heaped up in one corner to serve as ramparts, or scattered far and wide, broken open and smashed to pieces, showing that plunder, as well as massacre, had been going on. Underneath the rock, just where it had fallen, was to be seen, in a perfect lake of blood, a hideous mass of mangled corpses, of detached limbs, and flesh in strips. In the midst of all these corpses a few poor wounded wretches were heaving, struggling, making superhuman efforts to avoid the touch of the bodies on

whom death had laid his icy hand, and to escape a living tomb among the dead ; the very mountains echoed the piercing shrieks which resounded over this ghastly scene.

MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle had then arrived too late, at the end of the battle where one of the two forces had suffered defeat. The upheaving of the rock had only served to augment the number of the victims ; the block of granite, in pitching headlong on the plain, had, no doubt, crushed beneath its ponderous weight the remnant of the Europeans left in the camp, for there could be no doubt but that the baggage, tents, and rifles strewn upon the ground belonged to Europeans.

From the camp the gaze of our two travellers wandered to a space, about twenty yards square, where were stationed the survivors of this vast hecatomb. At first they only perceived a confused group, whence were proceeding shouts and signs apparently intended for themselves. Little by little the details became more distinct ; Arab bûrnus, linen tunics, European clothes could be distinguished. Then a few white faces stood out from the black and bronzed features surrounding them.

M. Desrioux could look no longer ; his eyes closed, he grew deadly pale, his limbs gave way beneath him, and if M. de Pommerelle had not caught him and propped him up against the side

of the mountain, he would inevitably have fallen down the abyss.

His eyes had rested on her whom he felt he should see—he had recognised Madame de Guéran.

If the two young men had been able, in a few moments, to discover their friends in the midst of the crowd and single them out on that extensive battle-field, MM. de Morin, Périères, and Delange had seen them for a long time, though without recognizing them. At the moment when, driven out of their camp by the amazons, they had sought refuge with their servants and surviving soldiers on the other side of the entrenchment, at the very moment when they were defending themselves with all the energy of despair, knowing full well that they, in their turn, were about to be massacred as their companions had been, suddenly a terrific detonation had sounded in their ears, and the mountain had appeared and overwhelmed their enemies.

Dazzled by this miracle, and almost alarmed at their own escape, they remained at first with their eyes fixed on the mountain, whose fall had not only delivered them out of the hands of the Walindis, and snatched them from imminent death, but had also opened up for them a road to the east, the lakes, and to Europe.

But, as Parisians are somewhat sceptical on the score of miracles, MM. Delange and de

Morin, their momentary stupor over, gave M. Périères the credit of their deliverance. Had not he conceived the idea of blowing up the rock to secure a passage through the mountain, and was it not, therefore, probable that he had put his theory into practice? Périères, for his part, imagined that somebody had stolen his idea, and he was looking with admiration on the thieves, whoever they might be. The minds of all three of them were, nevertheless, rather uneasy. They wanted to know how it had happened that the mountain, instead of bursting open at the base, above the mine which one of them must have sprung, revealed an aperture over their heads?

Whilst these thoughts passed through their minds, and their eyes were fixed on the block of stone, of which one end had just rolled on to the plain, and the other remained supported, thirty yards higher up, beside the welcome aperture, two men appeared suddenly on the threshold of this blessed gate, in the foreground of the triumphal arch.

Under the shade of the two lofty mountains, between which they were advancing, surrounded by shadow, they had all the appearance of emerging from a sepulchre. But, once on the brink of the abyss, on the platform of the uplifted rock, they were in the full glare of the sun. Clothed in white, and radiant in the sun-

light, they might have been taken for two angels from heaven, who had lighted on the mountain before continuing their flight down to earth.

It is quite possible that this sudden apparition contributed to the flight of the amazons in a greater degree than the noise of the explosion which accompanied the fall of the rock. After their first consternation they might have rallied for another attack on the Europeans, and for the rescue of their Queen ; but, when they saw that their motionless and immoveable hill, their sacred mount, had fallen and crushed beneath it many of their number, and that it had opened to give egress to supernatural beings, a thousand superstitious fears took possession of them, and these terrible warriors became women once more.

The surviving Nubians, the Arab interpreters, the Dinkas, and the Monbuttoos, on the other hand, notwithstanding their amazement, understood that heaven was protecting them ; the mountain was their ally, the two angels their deliverers. They, therefore, prostrated themselves in gratitude to the God, the idol, or the sorcerer who had saved them.

As for the Europeans, they thanked their deliverers from the depths of their souls, but they did not endue them with any magic power or supernatural influence. They had a simple ex-

planation at hand; a European caravan, advancing from the south-east to the north-west, after having crossed the Blue Mountains, had found their road blocked up by an immense rock, and, being unable either to get round or over it, they had underminded it and blown it up. Their only idea had been to open up a passage for themselves, and chance had willed that at the same time they should do a like office for another caravan proceeding in an opposite direction. Accident, which always appears so improbable in romances, but which plays so large a part in human life, had also contrived that the meeting of these two caravans, and the fall of the mountain should take place at an opportune moment, and in a propitious hour.

The idea never occurred to them that chance, or accident, was not entirely responsible for what had occurred, and that they were face to face with their friends, the Count de Pommerelle and Dr. Desrioux. How could they possibly have supposed that these two men, one detained, as far as they knew, in France by duty, and the other by the force of habit and his own disinclination to move, would appear in the heart of Africa, in 2° lat. N.?

M. Desrioux, on the contrary, who was entirely taken up with the thought of Madame de Guéran, who had for so long a time been journeying towards her, and expecting every

moment to meet her, had recognised her at once, or, perhaps, felt by inspiration that she was at hand. It is more than probable, also, that she in her turn was conscious of his presence before he was seen by his friends.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle, whilst contemplating the field of battle, were rejoined by their escort, who, on reaching the place where the mine had exploded and left a free passage, were overcome with admiration, and attempted to worship the two white men, before whom even the mountains opened. But the Count and the doctor made short work of this intended adoration. They calmed the enthusiasm of the Beluchs, and ordered them to fall in two by two and follow them.

It was a curious spectacle to behold this long file of men in their strange, gaudy-coloured dress, resting on their lances, and slowly descending, step by step, the species of aërial way lying open before them.

MM. de Morin, Delange and Périères, in their turn, followed by a few servants and soldiers, advanced to meet the new arrivals. Miss Poles was not in a position to accompany them, being engaged in effecting some necessary repairs to her toilet, which had suffered considerable damage in a desperate struggle against three amazons, to whom she had given the *coup de*

grâce with her revolver. Gratitude impelled her to welcome her deliverers, but coquetry withheld her from appearing before strangers, Europeans, fellow-countrymen, perhaps, with her dress in tatters, her sleeves tucked up to her shoulders, her hair dishevelled, her face as red as the middle of the fire, and her spectacles anyhow. When M. Delange endeavoured to induce her to accompany them, she replied—

"No, I do not care about presenting myself before these gentlemen just now; I am not looking my best."

Nobody dreamt of asking Madame de Guéran to go and meet the newly-arrived caravan. She was on her knees beside her husband, who was dangerously wounded and, perhaps, dying. Her eyes were fixed on him, and she appeared wholly absorbed in the contemplation of the face which she had known in all the glory of youth and manly beauty, and now again beheld worn by suffering and fatigue.

Ah! why had he left her for so long! What grief had he not caused her! To what dangers of every kind had he not exposed her! And now she had found him only to lose him very soon, for he could not recover from the wounds inflicted by that woman!

But why had Walinda been so furious against him? Why, instead of hurling herself upon her enemies, had she chosen to attack her prisoner and her guest so unmercifully?

She was there, close to her, only a few yards off, that terrible Queen, that Venus in ebony, as Dr. Delange called her. After having literally torn her away from the body she was holding in so deadly an embrace, Nassar, assisted by some Dinkas, had stripped her of her fatal bracelets and necklets, had bound her legs with cords, tied her arms down to her sides, and thrown her at full length on the ground.

If Walinda was powerless to strike, she took account of everything that was going on around her. Lying on her back, stark naked, but, at the same time, partly hidden by the grass which had opened out to receive her, and now enclosed her, she never took her eyes off the victim rescued from her clutches, the prey snatched from her, and she cast glances of furious hatred on the wounded man and the woman kneeling by his side.

By-and-by, Madame de Guéran crept closer to her husband, and took one of his hands in hers. The Queen's look at once became more ferocious still, her nostrils dilated, her lips half opened, and a shudder went through her body, motionless up to this time. She made frantic efforts to burst her bonds, without success, but by dint of great exertion, she managed to turn over and lie with her face downwards.

Then, by bending her knees, resting first on one shoulder and then on the other, dragging her chest along the grass, and pushing her-

self by means of the ground, she managed to get close to the spot where M. and Madame de Guéran were. She stopped every time the grass around her rustled, and held her breath lest she should attract the attention of her enemies.

As soon as she was close to them, she shut her hands, of which she had the use, buried her fists in the sand, and, having thus secured a support, she was able to lift her head and chest to the level of the grass. There she remained motionless and silent, brooding, so to speak, over her enemies, with parted lips, ready, like a viper, to spit out her venom.

Madame de Guéran did not see her. Absorbed in her own thoughts, she heard nothing, saw nothing. She was scarcely conscious of what had passed since the moment when her husband had so suddenly appeared before her. He was brandishing an axe, and fighting valiantly when one of those terrible amazons fell upon him, overthrew him, and wounded him mortally. Simultaneously with this, shouts of terror had reached her ears, the camp was invaded—then came a terrific explosion, followed, first of all, by renewed din, and, then, by absolute silence. She did not make any attempt to recall what had happened. What did it matter to her? After so much exertion, she had only found an inanimate being, a dying man. She was overwhelmed by her grief and her reflections, too.

However, as she had no more water wherewith to refresh the wounded man's lips and forehead, she turned round to ask for some. At that moment she perceived in the grass, close to her, the Queen of the Walindis, covered with M. de Guéran's blood.

She did not turn away in disgust; on the contrary, she surprised herself in the act of contemplating this woman, who had for so long a time kept her husband a prisoner.

The features of the Queen, notwithstanding their cruel expression, were charming; her eyes full of determination; her lips full, bright red, and voluptuous to a degree; her shoulders, her limbs, and such parts of her body as could be distinguished from amidst the dust and blood covering it, were superbly moulded, splendidly formed.

As she looked at Walinda, she glanced, too, at M. de Guéran, and strange thoughts passed through her mind, and darkened her brow.

At length she got up, and, as the serpent lying at her feet made another effort to get near her, to bite her, perhaps, she pushed her away with her foot contemptuously, but without any appearance of anger. At the same time, Nassar, not finding his prisoner at the place where he had left her, followed the track made by her body in the grass, came up to her, and, taking hold of the cords round her with both hands, lifted her up, and threw her farther away.

This short incident recalled Madame de Guéran back to reality; she looked round her, and was amazed to find that her friends and servants were no longer in sight. What had become of them? Presently she saw them approaching from the direction of the mountain. Were they going to fight again? What heaps of dead and dying were lying around them! Was it not high time to put an end to this carnage? No, they were not making ready to fight; they were waving their arms in the air, and making signs to somebody with their hands.

Who were they saluting after this fashion? She raised her eyes, and saw another body of men descending from the mountains by a road which she did not remember having seen in the morning.

At the head of the new-comers, marched a man dressed after the European fashion, of medium height and elegant figure. His hair, somewhat long, and his light beard looked like threads of gold in the brilliant sunlight. The black peak of his grey cap threw a shade over his wide forehead, straight nose, smiling lips, and large blue eyes with long eyelashes—a grand head, at once energetic and sweet.

He walked slowly, supporting himself by a lance, but with upright body, and apparent unconsciousness of the difficulties of the road. He took no notice either of the escort behind him,

or that coming to meet him; he might be said to be making directly for Madame de Guéran, without seeing what was going on around him, with his eyes fixed on her alone.

Suddenly, she uttered a cry; she had just recognized him. She had recognized him first of all, from where she was, without stirring a step, even sooner than his best friends, who were almost touching him. It was he! It was he! He had overtaken her; he had found her in the desert, amidst chaos!

At first, when she recognized him, she felt as if she was going to faint and sink down to the ground. But she soon recovered herself, and an irresistible impulse appeared to attract her towards him who was drawing nearer and nearer, with his eyes fixed upon her.

She made two or three steps mechanically, and then stopped abruptly. All the blood, rushing from her heart, mounted into her cheeks; she raised her arms, covered her face with her hands, and, turning back, ran and knelt once more by the side of M. de Guéran, taking hold of his hands and kissing his forehead, as if she were imploring pardon and placing herself under the protection of her husband.

MM. Desrioux and Pommerelle had reached the base of the rock; a yard only separated them from the plain; they leaped down and fell

into the arms of their friends, who had at last recognized them.

They looked at each other, shook hands, and embraced, too much moved to ask for either explanations or news, or to express either astonishment, curiosity, or gratitude.

The Beluchs and *pagazis* of Zanzibar at the same time fraternized with the Nubians Soudan men, and Dinkas. They did not know each other, nor had they ever had an idea even of each other's existence; but they were birds of a feather all the same. They escorted caravans, carried baggage, and, in short, were colleagues—quite enough to justify the warmest embraces.

Whilst these pacific demonstrations were taking the place of the terrible battle which had just been fought, M. Desrioux left his friends, handed M. de Pommerelle over to them, and went alone towards Madame de Guéran.

She heard him coming, turned round and went a few steps to meet him, by this time calm, brave, quiet and self-possessed.

When he reached her and was looking at her without being able to say a word, she held out her hands and let them rest for a moment in his frankly, as a sister might do, in sight of all.

This affectionate reception enabled him to recover himself, and, presently he said in a low, sad tone—

"My mother died in my arms; she no longer needed me, and so—I am come to you."

"You have done well," she replied. "We will mourn your dear mother together."

After a short interval of silence she resumed—

"Did you, before you started, receive my last letter, dated from Khartoum, in which I spoke of M. de Guéran?"

"No," said he, surprised. "What did you tell me about him?"

"I told you," she replied tremblingly, "that, according to the latest information, my husband was still living, and that I had every reason to hope that I should find him."

"Ah!" said he, paler than ever. "And have you found him?"

"Yes, but to lose him for ever, if you do not succeed in saving him."

"If he can be saved," he murmured, "I will save him!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

Madame de Guéran led Dr. Desrioux to the side of the wounded man. He knelt down on the grass, and looked fixedly for a long time at the man he was called upon to restore to life. The lover had vanished, and the man of science reappeared on the scene.

By the time he had risen, all the Europeans had come up and formed a single group. He drew Dr. Delange aside and was about to converse with him in an undertone, when Madame de Guéran stopped him and said—

"I wish to know the truth. Speak; I am strong enough to hear anything you may have to say."

"I have nothing to conceal from you," replied M. Desrioux. "I merely wished to ascertain whether my colleague was of the same opinion as myself, and to ask his permission to speak."

"Say on, my dear fellow, and do not be afraid of treading on my professional toes," said M. Delange. "I have, unfortunately for myself, and," he added, with a smile, "very pos-

sibly for others also, been a kind of amateur doctor, whilst you have devoted all your care, all your time, and all your intelligence to your profession. I look upon you as a master rather than a colleague."

M. Desrioux bowed, without speaking.

"Moreover," continued Dr. Delange, "I only acted for you amongst your friends and with this caravan. You have turned up, and even if I did not give way before your talent and your high position, I should yield to your right."

"I thank you for all the kind things you have said about me," replied M. Desrioux. "But above all do I thank you for allowing me to attend upon M. de Guéran in conjunction with you. I have just examined his wounds, and I feel myself in a position to say that not one of them is serious. I would even add that they could be quickly cured, if the Baron were in his ordinary state of health. But before he was wounded he must have been ill for a long time, and very much pulled down; you can see that as well as I can. Recent occurrences have augmented his fever to an alarming extent; we must devote all our energies to reducing it, for it is heating his blood and will prevent the curing of his wounds. I only know one efficacious remedy, and that is, change of air."

"I agree with you," said Dr. Delange. "But how are we to remove M. de Guéran with the

necessary speed to a more salubrious country than this, and to a fresh climate ? "

" Nothing is easier," replied M. Desrioux. " I have opened up for you a road to the mountains. Let us all set out to-day, and to-morrow, on the lofty summits, thanks to the sudden change, the fever will be subdued, and we shall no longer have occasion to fear the brain affection which at this moment gives rise to serious alarm."

" Let us start, by all means, and as soon as possible. We have no possible inducement to remain here in the midst of all these corpses, too numerous for us to think of burying them. The air we are breathing on the plain will be deadly in a few hours."

" And you may as well add," said M. Périères chiming in, " that we may be attacked again from one moment to another. The amazons, when they recover from their first surprise, will re-form and march against us for the purpose of rescuing their Queen. I insist, also, on our immediate departure. What do you say, de Morin ? "

" Certainly. This spot is both unhealthy and depressing, for we are not only surrounded by the corpses of our enemies, but more than one faithful follower lies dead beside us. I counted our loss in killed whilst Delange was attending to the wounded, and I find that we have lost thirty of our bearers, fifteen Nubian and Dinka

soldiers, and about twenty of the Monbuttoos whom we had armed. I am as anxious as you are to get away at once from this accursed plain. But can we start at once? Our cattle have been killed and our provisions scattered far and wide. Ought we, denuded of all our resources as we are, to venture in such numbers up that mountain?"

"Provisions for a few days will suffice," replied M. Desrioux, "and I think we might at once collect what we have and divide them amongst our men. Just look at my escort; they have soon found a grazing ground in the midst of your camp, and they are making up, at your expense, for the privations they have suffered for some days past. As for the cattle, their loss is not to be regretted, seeing that we could not have taken them with us up the mountain. Besides, in ten or twelve days, we shall have reached Lake Albert, and on its western shore we shall find the caravan we left there with a sufficiently large quantity of provisions."

"I will also take the liberty of remarking in my turn," said M. de Pommerelle, "that if we do not start at once so as to reach Lake Albert on or before the 25th of December, the said caravan, which is not under any obligation to wait for us beyond a month, will have taken the road again with all our baggage and our most precious treasures."

"Very well," said M. de Morin. "That settles the question of provisions. But we have some duties to perform before we can think of starting—to bury our dead, for instance."

"Nassar, by my orders," said M. Périères, "is seeing to that. The Nubians will have a grave; indeed, it is already being dug."

"And Munza?" asked M. de Morin. "He died for us, or, at all events, in our cause."

"He is already buried," said M. Périères, "and his tomb is worthy of his rank. The rock crushed his body in its fall and buried it in the ground. Instead of a tombstone, a mountain will mark the spot where rest his remains."

"But," urged de Morin once more, "what about his army? Have we any right to leave them to their fate?"

"Have we any more right," replied M. Périères, "to drag that horde of barbarians and cannibals into another part of Africa, into regions which enjoy, at any rate, the appearance of civilization? Moreover, my dear fellow, the Monbuttoos have but one idea—that of returning as quickly as possible to their own country. They would refuse to go any farther with us."

"That is possible; but when we are no longer by to assist them, they will be massacred by the Walindis."

"Or the Walindis by them," replied M.

Périères. "Make use of your telescope. The whole army, which took to flight on the death of Munza, has, during the past hour, recovered its original formation, not to join us, not to defend us, but to destroy the villages, burn the huts, pursue the vanquished amazons, kill them, and, if you do not object to my saying so, undoubtedly eat them. Have we not already seen that little operation performed in the case of the Domondoos? I have no sympathy whatever, my dear fellow, with these people, and I cannot help saying that you, as a rule so full of common sense, are to-day raising objections to our departure which are absurd."

M. de Morin did not reply; but, leaning over to M. Périères, he said in a whisper—

"How can I be reasonable on such a day as this? Within twenty-four hours to stumble across a husband and a rival!"

"Do not make yourself out to be worse than you really are," replied M. Périères in the same tone. "The husband owes his deliverance to you alone, and you are only regretting that he has been restored to us in so deplorable a state. As regards Desrioux, do you bear him any ill-will for having saved our lives and opened up for us a road to Europe? If it had not been for him, my dear fellow, we should at this moment be either lying dead on the ground, or, what would not be much better, prisoners of Walinda."

"Wait a bit," said Delange, coming up. "I have no objection to being taken prisoner by her. Where is the sweet creature?"

"There she is," replied Périères, pointing to the Queen, who was still lying at full length on the grass.

"And what are we to do with her if we start to-day? Shall we let her go?"

"No, a thousand times no!" exclaimed de Morin. "We should be guilty of the gravest imprudence by doing anything of the sort. If she were restored to freedom she would lose no time in collecting together the scattered remnants of her army and would attack us afresh. Cannot you see how ferociously she looks at us?"

"I see," replied Delange, "that she is a splendid creature, quite worthy of the name I gave her, and the interest I take in her."

M. Périères, without paying the slightest attention to the words of the too susceptible Delange, said to M. de Morin—

"How can she attack us if we start to-day? She would not follow us up the mountain."

"Why not?"

"What road would she take?"

"The same that we are going to take," replied de Morin. "Up this rock suspended in mid-air. If we can scale it, encumbered with our baggage, our provisions, and our wounded, will the amazons, whose activity you have had

every opportunity of remarking, find any difficulty in following us?"

"Upon my word," replied M. Périères. "You are decidedly off your head to-day; the most simple things escape you. As soon as ever our caravan reaches the plateau whence Desrioux first burst upon our gaze, all the men can insert their lances, after the fashion of levers, underneath the rock, which is simply leaning against the cliff. One good heave all together will suffice to overturn it; its base will roll over on to the plain just as its summit has already done, and the road to the mountain will once more be closed against the natives of these parts."

"You are right," said de Morin. "Our retreat is safe enough. I can only now plead the cause of the Monbuttoos. They are savages of the worst description, and cannibals to boot. I admit all that. But we ought to be all the more grateful to them for having neither molested nor eaten us. We cannot, therefore, under the pretext that Walinda will not be able to fight us, leave our ancient allies exposed to so dangerous an enemy."

"But how are we to get rid of her?" persisted M. Périères. "Do you intend to have her shot?"

"She certainly deserves it, and the idea has crossed my mind, but I lacked courage to give the order. If you like to take the responsibility—"

"Never. And you, Delange?"

"Not if I know it! She is far too pretty. All my anger fades away before her beauty. Why not take her with us? We can set her at liberty in eight or ten days, as by that time the Monbuttoos will have left the country. She is quite sharp enough, believe me, to discover the way back to her kingdom by herself."

"Yes," replied de Morin, "that is the only course open to us; we have no choice. But she is a very dangerous prisoner, and we must not let her out of our sight for a moment."

"I will take care of that," replied Delange, quickly.

"I thought we should come to that," replied M. de Morin, laughing. "Only—take care of Miss Poles! You are reinstated in her good graces; are you going to forfeit them once more?"

"My dear fellow," said Delange, "do not be alarmed. As soon as the new caravan appeared on the scene I was laid on the shelf. Just watch the look she bestows on Pommerelle, and observe the elaborate toilet she has made in his honour."

"For goodness sake, gentlemen, let us arrange about starting," said Dr. Desrioux, joining his three friends. "It is already three o'clock in the afternoon, and in the common interest we ought, this very night, to pitch our tent some twenty feet above this place."

CHAPTER XXX.

The departure was not effected quite so easily as might have been anticipated. The de Guéran caravan, whilst the Europeans were laying their plans, had been making some of its own, and these plans consisted in resting until the evening, and then joining the Monbuttoos for the purpose of celebrating a united orgie on a gigantic scale in honour of the victory. As an exceptional case, and contrary to all their habits, the negroes were taking thought of the future, and had come to the conclusion that their chiefs intended to indulge them with a long spell of idleness. Had they not found the white man they had been seeking for so long? Had not the object of the journey been attained, and, before retracing their steps along the road by which they had come, were not both soldiers and porters entitled to make a long stay in the conquered country, the country of lovely women whose charms had been vaunted to arouse their zeal? These women were terrible in battle—that they had found out to their cost, but now that they were conquered and disarmed,

they might possibly be found to possess an amount of amiability hitherto unsuspected.

Consequently, when an attempt was made to rouse the Nubians from their day-dreams, and warn them to be ready to start at once, some very significant murmuring was heard. Although, owing to the mingled firmness and tact of M. de Morin, the soldiers had learnt discipline, though for more than a year they had proved themselves to be faithful and devoted servants, and had become almost civilized by contact with the Europeans, as soon as a disposition was shown to rob them of the fruits of their victory and to restrain them from the indulgence of their ruling passion, they became what they were before—unreasonable, unmanageable and mutinous.

Their leaders had, in the long run, gained too great an ascendancy over them not to be able to overcome this resistance, which, after all, was more a matter of instinct than of reason. They made them understand that the hour for repose was not yet come, and that the Walindis might yet collect their scattered forces and attack them again. They showed them the heaps of dead bodies lying all around, and hinted that they too were still liable to share the fate of their friends. But, as soon as they comprehended that, instead of regaining the road to the north and going back to their own country, they were to scale the mountain range

and go on southwards, they made fresh objections. It was all over with them! They would never more set eyes on the Dinka land, or their beloved Nubia, or the dear old Nile! When the Europeans arrived at the end of their journey, so far, far away, they would leave them to their fate, and how were they to get back to Khartoum?

These complaints were reasonable enough up to a certain point. The bearers and soldiers, it is true, had been engaged to follow their leaders whithersoever it might please the latter to go, but nobody then foresaw so long a journey. The return, indeed, would be a matter of considerable difficulty for everybody, if these men were taken as far as Zanzibar.

"Why should we go there at all?" M. de Pommerelle was the first to suggest. "The journey is a long one, and it took us more than six months to accomplish it. How are we to get across Lake Albert again on our rafts? They did very well for us, because the current took us from east to west, but when it becomes a question of going against the current, what are our means of transport? Can we rely upon the inhabitants of Magungo, who saluted our departure with flights of arrows, sending their canoes to bring us over to the eastern side?"

"And even supposing," contined Dr. Desrioux, "that we manage to get across the lake, I dread the effect of the long journey and the

unhealthy climate of certain parts of the country upon M. de Guéran."

"You have, I suppose," asked M. Périères, "some other route to propose?"

"Certainly I have. As soon as we have rejoined our caravan on the shore of the Albert Nyanza, there is nothing to prevent our remaining on the western side, and proceeding northwards to Gondokoro, as Baker, Speke, and Grant did. We are now in lat. 2° N., and Gondokoro, or Ismailia, is about 5°. It is a mere question of 3°, or, in other words, seventy-five leagues, a matter of six weeks at most. That is evidently the shortest way."

"Undoubtedly," said M. de Morin, "seeing that we are at least 8° from Zanzibar. But, when once we have reached that island we should be, as it were, at home again, because we could take ship there and steam to Europe."

"At Gondokoro," replied Dr. Desrioux, "we can hire a vessel. We shall then descend the Nile and set sail for France after a more direct fashion still."

"The proposed route appears to me to be an excellent one," said M. Périères, as if to close the discussion, "and I move that it be adopted. It has, moreover, one considerable advantage; it will enable us to overcome all the objections of our Nubians and Dinkas. We shall be taking them home in a straight line, and, if they so wish, we can drop them at their respective

doors. Will you allow me to make this arrangement with them ?"

MM. de Morin and Delange gave their consent, and M. de Pommerelle could not help being charmed at such a resolution.

"After having done so much," said he, "to come to Africa, I should have been in despair at having seen so little and being obliged to go back the same way. It is bad enough to be deprived of all chance of a peep at the countries of the Monbuttoos, the Niam-Niam, and the Bonges, but you must tell me all about them, and I will try to console myself."

"I will console you," said Miss Poles, accompanying her words by one of her most seductive smiles. "I will talk to you about King Kadjoro, a very charming man, and about his royal brother Munza, of whom I will not say one word in disparagement—his tomb is too close to us."

"Mind you tell him *all* your adventures," said Dr. Delange, with a laugh.

"I will not forget anything, sir," replied Miss Poles, in a tone of pique. "A man like M. de Pommerelle is worthy of truth."

As she said the words—M. de Pommerelle—she plumed herself to such a degree, that there was no disguising the fact that he had made a great impression upon her.

Whilst this conversation was going on, M. Périères unfolded to Nassar and the Arab in-

terpreters the plan of action he was about to adopt. They understood it at once, and undertook to explain it to the caravan.

After having settled matters with the Khartoum people, an arrangement had to be made with the Zanzibar contingent. When the latter heard of the proposed route, they began to grumble—"What was to become of them? How were they to get back from Gondokoro to the coast and their own country?" In reality, they had very little cause for complaint, as most of them had already made the trip, the central point in which is Lake Victoria, but they hoped, by means of grumbling, to secure an increase in their wages. They got what they wanted, for there was no dispensing with these fifty men, well armed and just calculated to fill up the gaps created by death in the de Guéran expedition.

Towards four o'clock in the afternoon, by dint of mingled arguments, threats and promises, the last efforts at resistance on the part of the two caravans were successfully overcome. Active preparations for departure were at once set on foot; the torn sacks were sewn up, cases closed again, and arms collected. The provisions and absolutely indispensable baggage were next got together, everything too cumbersome to be easily transported being left behind. Masters and servants, men and women, all concerned, worked their very hardest, Madame de Guéran alone

remaining with her husband, whilst Queen Walinda, whose bonds had been made still more secure, lay motionless on the ground.

M. de Morin, on making a survey of this army of labourers, at length noticed that Joseph was *non est*. He had satisfied himself some time previously, when inspecting the field of battle, that his faithful servant was not amongst the killed, and, reassured on this essential head, he had not troubled himself any more about that useless being. But now that he could not see him, he became rather anxious. At the very commencement of the battle, Joseph had ensconced himself behind his bullock and a vast array of boxes—had he, too, like Munza, been buried underneath the rock? Was he sharing, with the King of the Monbuttoos, the honour of a royal tomb? Joseph's decease would certainly not compromise the success of the expedition in any one way, but M. de Morin had always had a certain weakness for his valet; he looked upon taking him back to the Rue Taitbout in a state of perfect preservation as a point of honour, and he thought himself bound, before making an official report of his death, to make some effort to find him alive. At first he called him by name, adding thereto a series of epithets by no means complimentary, such as "good-for-nothing," "lazy," "scoundrel," "coward." As Joseph did not respond to these appeals, M. de Morin grew more tender.

"Joseph, my good Joseph, my dear Joseph, don't be afraid; the amazons have disappeared." This sweetness was equally futile; the valet remained invisible. His master then thought of drumming for him, there being no town-crier at hand with a bell. Accordingly a Nubian was provided with an empty tin case, and on it he executed a prolonged and artistic roll.

At the sound of the drum two serpents of the python species, called by the natives of Africa *metsé*, *pallah*, or *tari*, were seen to glide out of a cleft at the bottom of the rock. Passionately fond of music, like all their race, they were attracted by the roll of the African drum. Presently, there appeared behind them a man, or, rather, the head of a man, whose body was enveloped by a python five metres long and from thirty to forty centimeters in circumference. The head belonged to Joseph. Early in the morning this brave servant had come to the conclusion that things would turn out badly for him, and that his barricade was by no means a sufficient protection. Creeping along the foot of the mountain, he slipped into a cleft which might have been constructed on purpose to afford him a hiding-place. But the serpents, alarmed by the firing, had hit upon precisely the same idea, had chosen the same refuge, and taking Joseph, who was paralysed by fear, for the trunk of a tree, had coiled themselves round him. For several hours the un-

happy wretch was a silent spectator of the proceedings of these reptiles. A naturalist would assuredly have profited by the opportunity of studying their manners and customs, but Joseph, persuaded that his last hour was come, limited himself to repenting of his misdeeds, and silently confessing his sins.

At last the music produced its effect. Two of the serpents uncoiled themselves, one after the other, and left their perch, whilst the third, converting a point of a rock into a fulcrum, wound his tail round it, and, without quitting his victim, drew him outwards. A general rush was made to rescue Joseph as soon as his terror-stricken face, haggard eyes, and hair on end appeared in view, and as the pythons are quite harmless, they were driven away without difficulty. The lower orders of creation had certainly manifested a decided predilection for M. de Morin's valet. Bees, ants, leeches, termites of all kinds, and serpents had in turn disported themselves on his body, and left behind them charming reminiscences of his journey.

At five o'clock the united caravans were all ready to start.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The ascent of the rock, that bond of union between the plain and the mountain, was as easy as possible for the able-bodied men of the expedition, but the work of conveying the wounded up it was perilous in the extreme. Every obstacle, however, was overcome, thanks to the ropes in possession of the Desrioux caravan. These were tied one to the other, and thus made a sort of railing, firmly fixed on the plateau by the first arrivals there, and descending along the whole length of the granite bridge right down to the plain. By the aid of this support, M. de Guéran was carried in a hammock, borne on poles.

The use of her legs was restored to Queen Walinda, by order of M. Delange, who was answerable for her, and four Nubians, strictly enjoined to watch her narrowly, made her walk in front of them. Contrary to the expectation of everybody, she did not make the slightest resistance, but scaled the rock deliberately, without a murmur or even turning her head, just as if she were leaving her dominions of her own free will. When she reached the plateau,

she did not even glance back at the land of which, that very morning, she had been the sovereign. She appeared to have no eyes except for her former prisoner and for Madame de Guéran, who walked at his side.

The caravan by degrees wound along the defile traversed on the previous evening by MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle. The Beluchs, who knew the road, formed the vanguard; then came the wounded, escorted by Drs. Desrioux and Delange, ever ready to aid them, and followed by the women and the bearers. The Nubians and Dinkas, commanded by Nassar and the Arab interpreters, brought up the rear.

Before joining the ranks, the Europeans acted on the hint given by M. Périères. Some soldiers, provided with lances to be used as levers, lifted the part of the rock which rested against the mountain, and by a resolute and united effort rolled the block of stone over on to the plain.

The amazons, however, did not seem disposed to follow up the Europeans and rescue their Queen; their whole attention was given to escaping from the Monbuttoos, who in the last hour or so had made themselves masters of the country. These people made a terrible use of the victory they had not gained, setting fire to all the villages and huts, dancing and frisking around the bonfires, and going into mourning for their King in the gayest fashion.

The Europeans, after having cast a sorrowful

look over the field of carnage, and said a last adieu to the vast regions they had just traversed, followed the caravan. M. de Pommerelle walked beside his two friends, de Morin and Périères, and gave them—for up to this moment they had not had any opportunity for chatting—the latest news from Paris. This news was rather stale, eight months old in fact, seeing that the Count and the doctor had left France in the month of March, but they were none the less welcome to his hearers, exiles since October, 1872. M. de Pommerelle also told them how, in reading their letters, following them on the map, and trying to live their life, he had felt himself gradually acquiring a taste for far-off adventures. These and other confidential communications were interrupted by Miss Poles, who had left her place, allowed the caravan to defile before her, and now joined the Count de Pommerelle, that very attractive man, as she had just confided to Dr. Delange.

Left to themselves, MM. de Morin and Périères lighted a couple of those excellent cigars of which they had been so long deprived, a gift from M. de Pommerelle. After a few moments' silent enjoyment of these luxuries, they looked at each other, and the painter said to the man of letters—

"Well, we have found him at last!"

"Yes, we have found him," replied M. Périères. "And, moreover, we may safely say

that for a year past we have not left a stone unturned in that direction."

"With a chivalrous disinterestedness," added M. de Morin, "worthy a place in the records of practical morality."

"We shall figure in them one of these days, I dare say, my dear fellow; that is one consolation."

"But we have another."

"What is that?"

"We might have found him strong, well-to-do, and in perfect health, which would, I admit, have been all very well for him, but rather disagreeable for us. On the contrary he is in a deplorable state, and, to speak frankly, our jealousy has no longer any *locus standi*."

"Our execution is only postponed," observed M. de Morin. "We have been told that none of his wounds are serious, and that the fever will leave him when he reaches the high ground. In a few days perhaps—"

"In a few days, my dear de Morin," added Périères, "the husband will doubtless be cured, but the wife will not."

"What do you mean?"

"My meaning is simple enough. To-day Madame de Guéran only beholds in her husband a wounded man, an invalid, almost at death's door, whom it is her mission to recall to life. As soon as his health shall have been re-established, the husband will re-appear, and the

sister of charity, a wife once more, will call him to account somewhat severely. She was only too ready to forget the errors, to use a mild word, of M. de Guéran, so long as she believed him dead or in captivity; she will remember them on the day of his restoration to life and health. She cannot conceal from herself that he left her very cavalierly, at the end of two years only of married life, to run about the world, and she already looks upon herself as having been rather a fool, believe me, for having taken so much trouble and encountered so many dangers to regain possession of an eccentric and fickle husband. Up to this time she has been fulfilling a duty, and she sees nothing but the heroism of her action. The heroism disappears with the fulfilment of the duty, and then the minor points of the subject will come to the surface.

"If she had found him still in the power of some terrible African potentate, reduced to slavery and more or less in durance vile, she would have been satisfied. But she surprised him in the midst of a tribe of very attractive women, or very uncommon, as you will admit. One of them, their Queen by right both of birth and beauty, appears to love him to the verge of criminality. For fear he should escape her, she throws herself upon him, tears him in pieces like a wild beast, and if she does not kill him it is only because she is robbed of her prey.

Madame de Guéran is fully alive to these—petty details, shall we call them? She is very keen, and nothing escapes her. She has divined what she has not seen, and she admits, as we do, that the Baron, to have inspired so sanguinary a passion, must for his part have afforded some grounds for it.

"She does not look upon him as criminal; so much I will concede. She is far too intelligent not to understand the difficulties of the situation, and the necessities of slavery; but she will for a long, long time, perhaps for ever, resent his having placed himself in such a position. There was nothing to compel him to leave Paris and expose himself to all these adventures. 'He ought not to have been, and gone, and done it,' she will say to herself, if she is aware of that vulgar phrase. We must also make due allowance for womanly pride, and the peculiar delicacy of Madame de Guéran. She cannot feel flattered at being the successor of a native of equatorial Africa. Rest assured that the recollection of this female savage will haunt her throughout the remainder of her life, and will be a perpetual moral shower bath. Queen Walinda is lovely in our eyes, and especially so in those of the susceptible Dr. Delange, but, as a woman, she does not exist, so far as Madame de Guéran is concerned. She is a being of some sort, a fine animal of the ape tribe, overlooked by naturalists in their classifications, and the Baroness will

ever experience a feeling of repulsion towards the man who for six months took up his abode in the den of this semi-wild animal.

"I bring my long harangue to a close, my dear fellow, with these words. On the score of health M. de Guéran is not now formidable, and he will never be so for the simple reason that his wife is disillusionized."

"He is none the less her husband," observed M. de Morin. "He has been found, he lives, and his widow, whom we wished to marry, is out of our reach. But you are not so calm as you would have me believe. Whilst I was giving way to-day to my bad temper, you remained quiet and all smiles, but you did not suffer any the less. Come, make a clean breast of it."

"I admit it," exclaimed M. Périères. "I feel precisely as you do. I suffer, and I am jealous, not of the husband, rescued by us this morning on the plain, but of the rival who fell upon us from the top of the mountain. He is about to benefit by the state of mind and heart in which he finds the Baroness, and which I have just explained. He will benefit also by the rivalry of both of us, by that equality between us which has allowed Madame de Guéran to remain undecided and wavering, and by the love we have displayed for her, a love which has not roused any corresponding feeling in her heart, but has nevertheless prepared it for the reception of somebody else.

"Finally, rely upon it, he will benefit by the unexpected fashion of his appearance amongst us. The imagination of women is always taken by the marvellous, especially when it does not come to pass by design, when he who appears surrounded by fireworks has not consciously produced the illumination, and especially when he is as modest as he is brilliant. For I will do Desrioux justice, it was not his fault that he did not arrive by rail with his carpet bag in his hand. If he blew up the mountain, it was simply because he was without the means of scaling it; if he appeared to me in a cloud, duly furnished with wings, it was merely because chance, that great scene-painter, was pleased on this occasion to furnish a fairy-like tableau. Madame de Guéran was none the less moved by the explosion and its attendant apotheosis; even we were surprised into admiration. In a word, my dear fellow, and to make a long story short—we have been pulling the chestnuts out of the fire for the past year, and now Desrioux is going to eat them."

"You take it very smilingly, at all events."

"I laugh to keep myself from crying."

"And you accept the situation?"

"Just as you will have to accept it. What can we do? Any display of jealousy would be out of place and futile. Shall we quarrel with Desrioux? Have we dared to quarrel with each other? No, we recoiled from such an act

of injustice, and we shall recoil again. Moreover, as I have already said, Desrioux, thanks to his *coup de théâtre*, has saved our lives, and people as a rule do not fall foul of their saviours. Reflection must show us that we have only one thing to do—to get back to Paris as soon as possible, and console ourselves as best we may, and if we can."

Just as this conversation came to an end, the caravan emerged from the defile through which it had been wending its way. After a day so full of incident the moment for well-earned repose had arrived. Tents were pitched for the Europeans on a plateau of some extent, whilst the people of Khartoum and Zanzibar sought a sleeping place in the clefts of the mountain, or lay down on the rocks, huddling close together to keep out the cold. The centigrade thermometers registered eighteen degrees, but the natives of central and southern Africa shiver in anything under twenty. This lowering of the temperature was on the contrary beneficial to M. de Guéran, and Dr. Desrioux, before quitting his patient, ascertained that the fever had decreased sensibly.

The camp was soon buried in repose—Venus in ebony alone, with her large eyes wide open, looked fixedly at the tent wherein reposed her former prisoner.

CHAPTER XXXII.

On the fifth day of March, the caravan reached the elevated plateau where the Ulindi territory had first met the gaze of Dr. Desrioux.

The long ascent, interspersed with equally precipitous descents, had been both arduous and dangerous. The bearers frequently stood in need of assistance, embarrassed as they were by their heavy loads, and they had to be helped along by the aid of ropes, and, occasionally, by means of relieving them of their burdens. Several bags of provisions and other things of great value to the Europeans were left on the mountain or fell into the abyss.

MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle were here, there, and everywhere, endeavouring to hit upon the track they had traversed before, avoiding the paths which appeared to them to be too full of peril, discovering fresh ones, cheering and encouraging everybody.

Miss Poles was generally to be found close to them ; if she hated the sea, she was proportionately fond of the mountain, and, like most Englishwomen, she was possessed of remarkable climbing powers. It was quite a treat to see her scale, often quite unnecessarily, a lofty summit, and, planting her lance upon it, take

possession of it in the name of Great Britain, and bestow an English name on it. In this she was only imitating her fellow countrymen, who lose no time in christening all the mountains and lakes they discover, although it would be much more practical to retain the native designations. The French, Germans, and Americans appear determined to resist this stupid monomania, and Lakes Victoria, Albert, and Alexandra, and the cataract known as the Murchison Fall, in honour of the President of the Royal Geographical Society of London, will soon be designated on all maps by their primitive titles, M'Wootan, Oukéréoné, Akenyira. These names may not be quite so euphonious, but they are far more rational.

One day, whilst the caravan was resting on the top of a mountain, and before attempting the descent down its eastern side, M. de Morin joined M. Delange.

"Delange," said he, "in the exercise of my authority as leader of the caravan, for both Desrioux and de Pommerelle have thought fit to place their soldiers and bearers under my orders, I am under the necessity, in the common interest, of taking an important step."

"What is the matter? Your exordium rouses my curiosity."

"The matter is that we must release a prisoner in whom you appear to take a great interest."

"Queen Walinda? Yes, she is a splendid

creature, and she interests me, from a purely artistic point of view."

"Quite so," said de Morin laughing.

"Well, my dear fellow," continued Delange, "the fact is that she is so wrapped up in her former admirer, that she has no eyes for any one else."

"Be that as it may," replied de Morin, "I intend, metaphorically speaking, to show her the door. It has taken us five days to reach this spot, but she could manage the return journey in three, and, during the week thus occupied, the Monbuttoos will have had time to escape from Ulinda. The Queen will no longer be in a position to exterminate them, and we shall have saved them, as was our duty, from any measures of reprisal."

"Do you think it absolutely necessary," asked Delange, "to be in such a hurry? Could we not keep her prisoner for a few days longer?"

"That would be cruel. The Queen will have hard enough work, as it is, to find her way out of the labyrinth of mountains without our making her task still more difficult."

"How is she ever to get out of it? The rock which served us as a means of communication between the mountain and the plain has been overthrown into the abyss. An empty space, thirty yards high, separates her from her kingdom."

"First of all, my dear Delange," replied

M. de Morin, "permit me to point out that your thirty yards may be reduced to twenty, seeing that the rock is at least ten yards thick. Secondly, in anticipation of this little difficulty, I have paid your friend the delicate attention of leaving on the plateau the rope which we used as a railing. Walinda is quite capable of uncoiling it, and she is quite agile enough to descend to her own country with its assistance. So, you see, you need not be at all uneasy as to the fate of this very interesting person."

"Possibly so, but you are far more anxious about her return to her dominions than she is herself. She does not wish to leave us."

"That is possible also, but, unfortunately, I most decidedly wish her to leave us."

"Why, may I ask?"

"Because, in my idea, she is an element of danger in the midst of our caravan. She has not been able to accept her defeat, closely followed by her ruin, with resignation, and she is sure to be plotting something terrible against us."

"How can she do anything, bound and closely watched as she is?"

"In the long run some cord will give way, or her keepers will fall asleep, and, to tell you the truth, I have not much confidence in you as a chief warder. A clever and pretty—for she must be pretty—prisoner would have very little difficulty in getting possession of your bunch of keys, for your eyes would see nothing but the thief."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. But, if this reason is not sufficient for you, I have another at your service. We have no right any longer to inflict upon Madame de Guéran the sight of a woman who must recall to her mind unpleasant thoughts."

"Oh! as for that," said Dr. Delange, "Madame de Guéran has no cause for complaint. She has never found herself in the society of my prisoner, and if she has seen her it is quite her own fault. In a caravan, a hundred and fifty strong, marching in single file and winding about continually, one individual can very easily remain unseen. I do not say that the Queen has displayed this amount of delicacy, but I have displayed it for her. Several Nubians, by my orders, have surrounded her continually and kept her as far as possible from the Baroness.

"Forgive me," said de Morin. "I was wrong in mentioning this detail, and I apologize. But the other reasons I have advanced in favour of the immediate liberation of your prisoner are, I think, unanswerable. They are quite enough for me, and ought to be so for you. Consequently, you will have the goodness to attend to them."

"Your orders shall be obeyed, sir, by me," said Delange, bringing his hand up to the salute, "but I cannot answer for Walinda. She may not be willing to leave us."

"Out of love for her gaoler?" said de Morin smiling.

"Alas! no. The gaoler is not taken into consideration. The whilom prisoner is alone in question."

"All the more reason for getting rid of her at once. And now I leave you to give orders for her release, and I rely upon you to assist me in getting rid of her."

"You may rely upon me, since it is my duty," said Delange with a sigh.

As soon as de Morin had taken his departure, M. Delange had the Queen brought before him, and he gave the necessary orders for her to be set at liberty.

The men of the escort expected to see her give some sign of pleasure, but she did nothing of the kind. She, on the contrary, looked about her with an air of uneasiness.

"She thinks, perhaps, that we are going to kill her," said Nassar in reply to a question from M. Delange.

"Try to explain to her," replied the Doctor, "that she is at liberty, and may return to her kingdom."

Did Walinda understand the interpreter? None could tell. She was crouching on a rock, and, instead of glancing towards the territory of Ulindi, which appeared in the far distance, and was pointed out to her, she in silence and immobility fixed her eyes on the

caravan, now on the move once more, and winding like a serpent round the mountain.

M. Delange had not the courage to prolong the situation. He took a last look on the splendid creature whom he thought he should never see again, then turned away abruptly and, with his men, rejoined the rear guard of the caravan.

In an hour's time, when he had reached a dell commanded by the plateau he had just left, he turned his head once more.

Walinda, illumined by the burning rays of the setting sun, was still in the same place on the rock. He took his telescope and looked at her for a long time. Her head was always turned towards the caravan, but he could no longer distinguish either the covering left with her to protect her against the cold, or the bag of provisions which had been placed round her neck. She had hurled these presents from the Europeans into the abyss.

"Does she want to die of hunger and cold?" said Delange to himself.

Filled with sorrow for the unhappy being, he went to the front and overtook his friends. MM. de Morin and Périères were still interchanging their mutual confessions, Miss Poles was sighing by the side of M. de Pommerelle, and M. de Guéran, carried in his hammock, was being borne on his way escorted by his wife and Dr. Desrioux.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

About five o'clock on the following morning, just as the caravan was about to get under way, Nassar came up to MM. de Morin and Delange.

"The Queen," said he, "has not gone back to her country. By dint of walking all night she has just overtaken us, and is hiding down below there, behind a rock."

"Poor woman!" M. Delange could not help saying.

"You pity her?" said M. de Morin.

"Certainly, I pity her," and, he added in a lower tone, "I pity her as one pities a faithful dog chased away by his master."

"You forget that this dog bit its master. It was not even content with biting, but sprang upon him open-mouthed."

"Yes, but now that its rage and anger, both inspired by jealousy, have passed away, the dog has repented, and returns with drooping ears to its master's dwelling. It seeks him, moaning and whining, fawns upon him, and refuses to be driven away. It will not bite him again, you may be quite sure."

"I agree with you; but it will bite those who have replaced it in its master's affections, and usurped its place by his fireside."

M. de Morin turned to Nassar, and said—

"This woman must be got rid of at all hazards. I do not want to see her any more."

"How am I to carry out your orders?" replied Nassar. "When my men threaten her with the butt ends of their lances she does not appear to see them, and if they throw stones at her she does not seem to feel them."

"I warned you," said Delange to M. de Morin. "The simplest plan after all would have been to have kept her here in the midst of us, bound hand and foot."

"No, it was not the simplest plan," replied M. de Morin, impatiently, "and I have already told you why. This creature can no longer, with any propriety, form part of Madame de Guéran's caravan. Look here!" he added in an undertone, and rather unsteadily, "if I only were to consult my own interest, I should take very good care that the Baroness should always be seeing her. Her husband is rapidly improving physically, and to get rid of him morally would be quite fair, in which case Walinda would be of considerable use to me. But neither Périères nor I, as you may well understand, would ever dream of having recourse to such means; we despise such weapons, and, once for all, I will not allow our Sultana

to run the risk of setting eyes on your Venus in ebony."

"Have her put to death then."

"I shall very possibly have to do that in order to prevent her killing others; but, for mercy's sake, do not drive me to that extremity. Find some means of getting rid of this woman. I assure you that she is dangerous, and the responsibility which falls upon me, as leader of the expedition, positively appals me."

When M. de Morin had taken himself off, M. Delange allowed the caravan to pass on, and took his place in the rearmost rank so as to be able to watch all Walinda's movements.

She appeared in sight first of all from behind the rock pointed out by Nassar. She was looking about her in evident fear, and no longer had the pride and assurance so conspicuous in her in days gone by. Then she was lost to view again. She was, doubtless, endeavouring to hide herself behind the inequalities of the ground, amongst the shrubs and briars, and instead of walking she was creeping, so as not to be seen.

In the afternoon the caravan had to go down the side of a mountain, too rocky and precipitous to afford even an appearance of vegetation. The road along the smooth and slippery granite was perfectly exposed to view, there was absolutely no foothold, and not a single tuft of grass nor loose stone met the eye.

Then the Queen was once more seen on the top of the mountain just left by the caravan; she was following, step by step, at a distance of about fifty yards, the route taken by the escort. On she came, with head erect and firm, unyielding tread. She had no stick to aid her steps; she was entirely naked, illumined by the sunlight, and her coloured skin, red rather than brown, stood out in bold contrast with the grey and gloomy mountain side. When she stood still she might well have been taken for a splendid statue in terra cotta, life size and fixed in the rock.

The whole caravan could see her, and from time to time a soldier, or a bearer, would stop to contemplate her.

At the foot of the mountain they had just past, vegetation began to reappear, and presently isolated trees took the place of shrubs, to be followed by extensive forests. The shores of Lake Albert were at hand.

Walinda could now hide herself again, and she was no more seen until the evening.

When night came on a halt was made, and the soldiers, after having lighted fires to cook their evening meal and warm themselves, lay down and were soon asleep.

M. Delange remained awake; he felt that the protection he was endeavouring to extend to Walinda threw upon him a heavy responsibility. He could not help occasionally sharing

the fears of his friend, and, distrusting the vigilance of the sentries, he kept a sharp look out over the neighbourhood of the camp.

Towards midnight he saw Walinda once more. She was, doubtless, cold, and she quietly, with stealthy steps, approached one of the fires of the bivouac.

As soon as she reached it she began to warm herself, and when she had succeeded in doing that, never suspecting that any one was watching her, she crept on her hands and knees within the camp.

What was she going to do? What plan had she conceived? Did she intend to glide to the tent where Madame de Guéran was sleeping?

He remained silent and motionless, but ready to interfere should need be.

But the Queen, on that particular night, was not under the influence of any passion; she was neither thinking of her lost love, nor of vengeance. She was simply seeking to satisfy the hunger which was torturing her.

In a moment of anger she had hurled down the abyss the provisions handed over to her, and now, famished, mastered by instinct and not by pride, she was prowling round the camp in search of nourishment, seeking, near the smouldering embers, a few scraps of food, a forgotten grain or two of eleusine, some sorghum roots, or a bone to gnaw.

Having satisfied the pangs of hunger, she

withdrew from the camp, and hurried off to hide herself in the neighbouring woods.

On the following day nobody saw her. M. Delange in vain looked through his telescope at every spot of high ground where she could possibly appear, as well as at all the paths she could have chosen in order to follow the caravan.

"She has taken it into her head to return to her own country," said M. de Morin.

"I am more inclined to think that she has taken it into her head to die," replied the doctor.

Miss Poles was close to the speakers, and the remark of M. Delange roused her at once.

"Die!" said she. "Die! You talk about it quietly enough, and you do her honour enough and to spare. The idea of suicide presupposes a certain amount of self-will and intelligence, and this creature possesses nothing but animal instinct. Animals do not kill themselves; consult the naturalists."

"I have no need to consult them, Miss Poles," replied M. Delange, "to tell you that you are mistaken. An animal will not poison itself of its own free will, nor will it drown itself, nor will it break its own neck—all that I admit. But dogs have been known to allow themselves to die of hunger after the death of their masters."

"The dogs you refer to," said Miss Poles, with great acerbity, "had lived in the society of civilized people."

"Do you mean me to infer from that remark that M. de Guéran is not civilized?"

"I do not understand how M. de Guéran enters into the argument."

"But Walinda has lived in his society, and it appears to me—"

"I have not the least desire to know what appears to you. I merely maintain that this female savage is not a woman."

* * * * *

M. Delange awaited nightfall impatiently. He thought it probable that Walinda would approach the caravan, as on the previous evening, to warm herself and pick up the crumbs of the evening meal. But the sentries, kept awake by a keen north wind, were, for once, on the alert. The Queen did not put in an appearance, and the fears expressed by the doctor seemed likely to be realized. The unhappy creature would die of cold and hunger in some cleft in the mountain.

The thought worried him; he tried to sleep, but he could not even doze. Towards three o'clock in the morning he thought he heard a wailing sound in the distance. He pricked up his ears and listened.

The sound seemed to draw nearer; it became more distinct, and was repeated by the echoes of the mountain.

It was mournful in the extreme, and did not in the least resemble the cry of a human being. It was more like the prolonged howl of a wounded animal, or the baying of a dog at death.

The sentries listened in fear and uneasiness, and M. Delange had to get up and reassure them. Then, unattended, he entered into a neighbouring wood, where he thought he might find Walinda. Convinced that the wailing proceeded from her, he was anxious to succour her.

He did not see a living thing, and at daylight the sound ceased.

Thereupon he bent his steps towards the tent where Madame de Guéran had passed the night.

He knew that the Baroness was always the first to rise, and he hoped to be able to speak to her before anybody could appear to interrupt their conversation.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

M. Delange was not mistaken; Madame de Guéran had opened the doorway of her tent at dawn of day. As soon as she saw the doctor she went quickly towards him and, holding out her hand, said affectionately—

"So early! Then you have something to say to me. I am delighted, for I, also, for some days past, have had something to say to you, and you have never been near me."

"I feared to be in the way," said he.

"How could that possibly be?" she replied quickly. "Do you think that I have forgotten our long conversation one night on the mountain, just before we entered the southern provinces? You were not afraid of being in the way on that evening, and you probed my poor heart as if you had that terrible scalpel of yours in your hand. I have never borne you any ill-will for that, my dear doctor, as you know full well. On the contrary, from that very time I have inscribed your name on the list of my best friends, and that is the reason why, having sinned against friendship, I want to beg your pardon to-day."

"What sin have you committed, my dear penitent?"

"I agreed," she replied, "to your yielding your place to your *confrère*. I have allowed Dr. Desrioux to attend almost exclusively upon my husband."

"I was anxious that it should be so. You had not seen Desrioux for a long time, and I effaced myself so as to allow you to be often with him and hear all he had to say."

"Do you imagine," she exclaimed, "that he has spoken of his love?"

"There was no necessity for him to speak. He proved it to you by coming after you."

"And do you think," she continued, "that I can still now—"

She stopped; she dared not go on.

He put her thought into words.

"Do you think I can still love him? is what you wished to say. Yes, I do think so; I am convinced of it. You love him, and you do not any longer love your husband."

"It is untrue! It is untrue," she said, hiding her face in her hands.

"It is true," he replied. "You know very well that it is true, and you are suffering more than ever. It is simply my conviction on this score which has caus[illegible]me no longer to attend upon your husband."

"I do not understand you," said she in amazement.

"I would not have you say to yourself," he replied boldly, "that he owed his recovery to me, and I would not have you reproach me for your unhappiness."

"Oh, how can you say so?"

"I would have watched over him and saved him if Desrioux had not come. But he could replace me and I preferred to disappear. It is his business to effect this cure. His large heart and unselfish disposition will in it find their proper work. His love will profit, too, by it, for you will only love him the more for the self-denial he displays, and the self-immolation to which his professional honour and his conscience condemn him."

The camp showed signs of returning to life, and the solitude enjoyed by M. Delange and Madame de Guéran was on the point of being interfered with.

"In a few moments," said the doctor hurriedly, "our conversation will be interrupted. Do let me say a few words to you."

"Do so by all means. You are right; I had forgotten that you had something to say to me. What is the matter, my friend?"

"I am come to ask you to use your influence with M. de Morin to put an end to a persecution which worries me in spite of myself."

"A persecution!" she exclaimed. "Has M. de Morin been persecuting anybody in the caravan? Impossible? He is so good, so just——"

"You misunderstand me; he is not persecuting anybody. But, in consequence of an order he has thought fit to issue, and which, I admit, he had every right to give, a certain being is at this moment suffering—dying, perhaps."

"Good heavens? What are you saying? Why did you not tell me of this before? My negligence is, perhaps, to blame. Yes, since our departure from Cairo I have always attended to the sick and wounded in the caravan and protected the weak, but now I am neglecting all my duties."

"I am not referring to any member of the caravan," said the doctor. "Nobody amongst us lacks either care or protection. I am speaking of an unhappy woman who persists in following us. She is one who is unworthy of all our pity, but at the same time one whom you have both the right and the will to save."

"Who is it?"

"Our enemy, Walinda."

"What! Is she here?"

"No; but she is close by. At least, I hope so."

He explained, as briefly as possible, to the Baroness the urgent reasons which had compelled the Europeans to convey the Queen to some distance from her country.

"It was the right thing to do," she said. "This woman might have proved formidable to

the Monbuttoos, and we were bound to protect our former allies."

Delange then informed her of the no less urgent reasons which had actuated M. de Morin in ordering Walinda to be set at liberty.

"For my sake!" exclaimed the Baroness. "It is to avoid wounding my susceptibilities that this course has been pursued, and this woman has been driven away! It is simply madness," continued Madame de Guéran, growing warm. "Do you imagine that I have paid any attention to her, or have ever seen her? Do you fancy for one moment that I should do her the honour of regarding her as an enemy and fearing her? Why should I have any grudge against her, I should like to know?" she added sarcastically. "What has she done that is not quite natural? What crime has she committed? She was quite comfortable in her dominions, when one day it pleased a European to enter her kingdom, in the face of all warnings and threats. He was young and handsome, and, above all, a white man; she had never seen any people of his complexion; she was astonished and dazzled, then she was touched, grew enthusiastic, and ended by loving the stranger. He, for his part, he, a married man, but one of those men who think nothing of stray amours, he, I say, also fell in love with this beautiful creature, and was contented to bask in her smiles. Then his wife, the other

woman, she who had stayed in France to lament his absence, she conceives the idea of erecting a tomb far away in Africa for the defunct, but instead of a corpse, she finds a living man, rather annoyed, perhaps, at being disturbed and discovered in his illicit domicile. A feeling of shame, however, drives him to make an attempt to join, if not his wife, at all events those friends who have come from so great a distance to his rescue. But the African woman is jealous; she does not care about being thrown on one side for the sake of the new comer, and she runs after her prisoner. He has an axe, he could defend himself, he could kill her, but he does nothing of the kind, he is afraid of hurting her. She has no such consideration for him; she seizes him, hurls him to the ground, and half murders him. According to the standard of morality in these countries she is right; was he not her prisoner, her slave, her property, her chattel? Would our laws even condemn her? Was he not armed? Could he not have resisted? And I am supposed to have a grudge against this woman? I am not so unjust. I can see her without suffering from the sight! If M. de Guéran had died of his wounds, I will not say but that I should have looked upon certain things with a more indulgent eye, and perhaps it would have been necessary to banish from my sight his—murderess. But he is being cured rapidly.

He will soon be up and about again, and when he does come to life, I should not like him to see his fondly loved—African suffering, and at death's door. I see M. de Morin, and I wish to speak to him."

Madame de Guéran, as a rule, so calm and self-possessed, had gradually roused herself to a state of excitement as she thus gave vent to the bitterness of her spirit. Her voice had quite a novel tone, and her look an unwonted fire, as she launched forth this accusation against M. de Guéran, and overwhelmed him with her complaints, as if to justify herself in her own eyes for not feeling towards him as she had formerly felt.

A few moments later on M. de Morin came to the doctor.

"You are a pretty fellow, you are," said he, laughing, "to complain to the Baroness about your commanding officer, and retail his orders. Very well, my dear sir, run after your Venus, and give her a snug corner at our shifting fireside. But, if misfortune comes of it, in strict justice do not hold me responsible."

As the sun rose in the horizon and the caravan was making ready to start, M. Delange, followed by Nassar and three or four of the shrewdest Nubians, set to work to seek for the Queen. They remained concealed in the wood until the caravan had disappeared from view, thinking that Walinda would only await its

departure to emerge from her hiding place, and, after devouring the scraps left behind in the abandoned camp, set off once more in pursuit.

Their calculations were quite correct. A quarter of an hour had not elapsed before they saw the Queen creep out of a dense thicket, and, under the impression that she was alone, advance towards where they were. As soon as they thought she could not escape them, they rushed upon her all at once, surrounded her, and took possession of her after a slight resistance.

Then, whilst she remained in fear and trembling, motionless on the spot where the Nubians had, so to speak, pinned her, Nassar explained to her that, so far from anybody wishing to do her harm, she would in future be permitted to live in the midst of the caravan. On receiving this piece of news, her eyes, dimmed by suffering and fatigue, brightened, the blood surged up to her cheeks, and she seemed overjoyed at being once more a prisoner.

Food was given to her, and she seized upon it with avidity, retiring into a corner and eating until her hunger was appeased. That operation over, she returned to her captors, and herself held out her arms to be fettered. Delange did not feel justified in omitting this formality, for, though the fears of his friend de Morin appeared to him to be exaggerated, he felt bound to pay some attention to them.

The prisoner and her escort speedily overtook the caravan, and were lost in its midst.

On the same day they descended the last slopes of the Blue Mountains, and gained Lake Albert. The spot they reached was within two miles of the one from which MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle had started. A dozen Beluchs, sent out as scouts, perceived their comrades, for whom they had been waiting for the last three weeks on the shores of the lake. They met and fraternized, and the Europeans of the de Guéran expedition experienced a real pleasure in tasting the good things brought from France by MM. de Pommerelle and Desrioux. Explorers who have for a long time suffered from privation, alone can understand this kind of substantial gratification.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A WEEK's rest was granted to the three united caravans, and nobody asked for more. When, as often happens, a European traveller is compelled by his escort to make a longer stay than he wishes in any one place, it is because the country through which he is passing, or the village where he has halted, does not offer any attraction to either the soldiers or his bearers. The western shore of Lake Albert certainly does not present any feature of interest to beings insensible to the beauties of Nature, and, consequently, all these people were desirous of reaching, as soon as possible, the less deserted districts.

This rest was more appreciated by the Europeans than by their escort. After so much excitement and fatigue, they had a pressing need of rest and the opportunity of recruiting their strength. The calm of the surrounding scene, the blue water which appeared to be lulled to sleep at their feet, and the fresh and smiling country, refreshed their jaded minds and calmed their over-excited nerves, whilst at the same time their limbs,

wearied by forced marches, recovered their wonted suppleness in the cooling waters of the Albert-Nyanza.

M. de Guéran, especially, could not fail to benefit from this interval of rest; the mountain air, the change of climate, and the comparatively speaking, fresh air following on the equatorial heat of Ulindi, did him a world of good. The fever, though it did not leave him altogether, gave him a respite of whole days, his weakness decreased sensibly, and the fears entertained by M. Desrioux, that an affection of the brain would supervene, were completely set at rest. But, in spite of all his care and the general solicitude, the wounded man had suffered cruelly during his ten days journey through the mountains. His hammock had more than once struck against obstacles on the road, and his wounds, which would have healed over, had he been at rest, were still open. Now, lying on a camp bedstead near the shore, under the shade of a tamarind tree, and far from the noise of the caravan, he was in a fair way to recovery. Under the pretext, a very good one, by-the-way, that he should make no effort to think, and that his brain should enjoy absolute rest, he was not allowed to speak to anybody, Madame de Guéran even avoiding any sustained conversation with him.

The rest and idleness on the shore of the lake might, possibly, have been prolonged in

the interests of the convalescent, had there not been a general wish to leave Africa before the commencement of the rainy season, and, above all, to reach Gondokoro before the general exodus of the boats, which takes place in March and April. Three months had still to elapse before the arrival of that period, and, according to all calculations, a few weeks would suffice to gain the last station on the Nile, but in Africa a considerable margin must always be allowed for accidents and eventualities of all kinds.

The expedition, therefore, set out once more on the 2nd January, 1874. For several days it journeyed, at the rate of about fifteen miles *per diem*, along the western shore of Lake Albert. As it advanced northwards, the lake became narrower, and presently the eastern side and the most trivial details of the country there could be distinctly seen without the aid of a telescope. The caravan might easily have imagined that it was on the bank of a large river if the maps had not made it clear that the sheet of water terminated in a point.

But, a few days afterwards, a river, instead of a lake, was in view.

"It is the Nile," said M. de Morin. "It flows out of the Albert-Nyanza, according to the records of Speke, Grant, and Baker. We have only to follow it and we shall reach Gondokoro by the territory of the Madis, Baris, and Latookas, and the valley of Ellyria."

"I fancy you are mistaken, my dear fellow," replied Dr. Desrioux. "The Nile, as far as I have been able to ascertain, flows from W.S.W. to N.E. The river before us, on the contrary, is running westwards, and appears to flow away from the countries you have just mentioned. It is also stated that the Nile, on leaving the Albert-Nyanza, at once enters a defile, formed by two chains of mountains, one of which is called Gebel-Kookoo, and I do not see any defile whatever. I am therefore tempted to believe that we have discovered a second arm of the Nile, flowing, like the other one, from Lake Albert. But what does it matter? Let us follow the route it appears to show us, always supposing that it does not make too sharp a bend and so turn us from our course."

This advice was followed; the caravan, without seeking for any other road or attempting to fathom this fresh mystery of the Nile, pursued its riverside way.

The justice of the doctor's observations presently became apparent. The stream alongside which they were journeying did not present any of the obstacles recorded as existing in the Nile, neither rocky islets, nor mud banks covered with papyrus, nor gloomy ravines, nor steep cliffs. They met with no impetuous torrents, nor narrow gorges, bordered by perpendicular rocks and forests of bamboos. The river appeared to be navigable along its entire

course, whilst the Nile, according to trustworthy authorities, is interspersed, between Lake Albert and Gondokoro, with impassable cataracts.

They were anxious to make enquiries amongst the natives, and to ascertain the name of their country, but the people, alarmed at the appearance of so numerous a caravan, and fearing to be taken as slaves, fled at their approach. In order to obtain a supply of provisions they had often to enter the abandoned huts and seize upon what they would have been willing to purchase. But, by the express orders of the Europeans, glass beads, iron wire, or calico, of which MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle had still a considerable stock, were left in exchange either in the dwellings or the public squares.

The river now no longer flowed westwards; from the fourth degree of latitude it ran directly towards the north, and this confirmed the Europeans in their idea that it would not take them out of their proper course. There were other indications, also, which not only removed all doubt on this head, but also showed that if the expedition had not actually entered the Latooka country, the frontier was close at hand. The aspect of the villagers, the dress of the natives, who now allowed themselves to be approached, a few costumes seen here and there, agreeing with the reports made by Baker, gave unmistakeable evidence that they were in a

district already marked and traversed, of which certain portions only, those they were crossing, were unexplored.

At length, on the 5th February, whilst the caravan was, as usual, following a course parallel with the Nile, they saw, on the left hand, the conical hill of Regiaf, and, on the right, the distant peak of Belignian. At sunset Gondokoro was but three miles distant.

The journey was, to a certain extent, at an end. Indeed, in the case of explorers who had come such an enormous distance, it was mere child's play, simply a stroll, to descend the Nile in a boat, to touch at Khartoum and Berber, to pass a few rapids, to cross Nubia and Egypt, arrive at Cairo, and embark on board a mail steamer for Marseilles.

As they had had a hard day's work, they determined not to enter Gondokoro the same evening; so, for the last time, the camp was pitched in the open air on the banks of the Nile. As usual, the tents of the Europeans were placed at one end of the encampment, as far as possible from the Khartoum and Zanzibar people, whose very numbers made them noisy. These tents, as might be expected after so long a campaign, were rather dilapidated, and more than one large slit gave free ingress to the sun's rays. That used by Madame de Guéran was the only one in a decent state of preservation, owing to the great care which had been bestowed

upon it. It was distinguished from the rest by a small flag, placed on the top of it so that the Europeans, in case of alarm, might more easily rush to the assistance of their beloved Sultana.

Nobody sat up late that evening. There was a general anxiety to be up and astir the first thing next morning, and to enter Gondokoro as soon as possible, in the hope of finding there news from Europe and of arranging everything for an immediate return. M. de Morin, however, before turning in to his tent, had a short conversation with M. Delange.

"Well," said he, "what are you going to do now with your Venus in ebony? I presume you do not intend to secure a berth for her on board the vessel we are about to engage? My fears are dissipated. Walinda, I admit, no longer indulges in black looks. You have kept watch and ward over her most conscientiously, and you have been prudently cruel enough not to cut her cords. Nevertheless, she cannot enjoy our society for ever. Up to to-day you have managed to prevent all communication between the Queen and her former prisoner. That was possible; the one, closely watched, marched with the rearguard; the other, still suffering, and always carried in his hammock, never left the centre of the caravan. But very soon M. de Guéran will be perfectly well, and will wander at will amongst the soldiers and bearers—do you take in the whole scene?"

"Make your mind quite easy," said the doctor. "From to-morrow Walinda shall be free, and everything leads me to believe that she will have no other thought than that of returning to her own country."

"In that case, good night," said M. de Morin.

He went away, and M. Delange, as soon as he was out of sight, rejoined his prisoner.

In order to watch her more readily, he had caused a sort of hut to be constructed for her between the European tents and the spot occupied by the escort. He often took her daily meal to her, and spent a few moments in her hut. He, nevertheless, did not allow himself to be moved with compassion, nor had he hitherto deemed it right to restore her freedom to her. But, now that Gondokoro was only a few miles distant, now that Egypt was almost reached, M. Delange departed from his severity and forgot his prudence. For the first time for six weeks the bonds of Venus in ebony were cast off.

Towards two o'clock in the morning, whilst the doctor, who had now entire confidence in his prisoner, was fast asleep and reposing after the fatigues of the day, Walinda took hold of a hunting knife which M. Delange had left close to her, looked carefully round about her, and, when she had satisfied herself that everything was quiet in the camp, and that the sentries

themselves, reassured by the proximity of Gondokoro, had left their posts, she glided stealthily in the darkness towards the tents of the Europeans.

There she halted and peered about for the flag which marked the tent occupied by Madame de Guéran. She saw it, and now sure of not making a mistake, she crept to the tent, noiselessly raised one of the curtains, glided inside, and then suddenly standing upright she bounded to the side of the bed, and buried her knife in the breast of the sleeper.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

At day-break on the following morning the drums and horns joyfully sounded the reveille. Neither soldiers nor bearers needed, as was their wont, any rousing to make them leave their couches of dried leaves or straw; they, like everybody else, were in a hurry to make their triumphal entry into Gondokoro. Walinda even, usually so unconcerned and apparently insensible to every noise and every incident of the journey, left her shelter. With her eyes fixed on the tents, she seemed impatiently to await the moment when the Europeans would appear and give the order to start.

M. de Morin was the first person she saw; then, a moment afterwards, M. de Pommerelle, M. Périères, and the two doctors, Delange and Desrioux. A moment afterwards Miss Poles emerged from her sleeping place, having got up before everybody else in order to devote more time to a toilet intended to create a sensation in Gondokoro.

Two tents alone gave no signs of life, those of Madame de Guéran and her husband, separated one from the other by ten yards.

At last, the door of the tent without the flag was seen to move, and at the moment when the rising sun was shedding on all around his earliest rays, and tingeing them with his rosy hues, the Baroness de Guéran stepped forth, smiling, charming as ever, into the light of day.

Walinda, on seeing her, uttered a terrible cry, a cry of mingled rage and terror.

Other cries were heard. They proceeded from Joseph, who, by order of M. de Morin, had entered M. de Guéran's tent to see whether he could do anything for him, and at the same time to tell him that all was in readiness for the march.

He found the unhappy man covered with blood, dead, and cold. The knife, with which the blow had been struck, was still in his heart.

Walinda had been misled; she thought to kill the wife; she had murdered the husband instead.

She did not know that, on the previous evening, Madame de Guéran, fearing that the mist from the neighbouring marshes of Gondokoro might prove injurious to her husband, had given her tent up to him and had passed the night in the one usually occupied by him.

* * * * * *

Eight days after this catastrophe, the Europeans secured two negghers, vessels used on the Upper Nile, and sailed down the river. A

third vessel, smaller than the others, carried the coffin of M. de Guéran.

Before embarking, the Europeans, after having settled all accounts in a most liberal manner, parted with their soldiers and bearers, who immediately entered into other engagements with the slave dealers, so plentiful in these parts at that particular season of the year. The servants alone were retained. Nassar, whose devotion and intelligence had been so valuable, and the two Arab interpreters, Omar and Ali, wished to accompany their masters as far as Cairo.

They had not been afloat for more than a few hours, Gondokoro was still in sight, and the vessels, compelled to tack, were making but slow progress, when M. de Morin thought he saw in the middle of the river a dead body being carried down by the current. He at once got into a boat, and, by dint of hard rowing, discovered that it was the body of Walinda. The splendid corpse, on which death had not yet commenced its work of destruction, which it still respected, floated on the top of the water, gilded by the beams of the setting sun.

The Queen, in despair at having spared her rival and killed the man she loved, had taken advantage of the consternation throughout the camp to escape. She had, no doubt, wandered for some days along the banks of the river, and then plunged beneath its waters.

In death she still followed the caravan and the coffin of her lover.

At Khartoum the Europeans made a very short stay, at the commencement of April, 1874, for the purpose of conferring with Colonel Chaillé Long, chief of the staff to General Gordon. In exchange for the news from Europe which he gave them, he obtained from MM. Desrioux and de Pommerelle information concerning the Uganda territory and its king, M'tesa, to whom he was about to pay a visit.

Nothing of importance occurred during the long voyage down the Nile; all the members of the party kept aloof from each other, wrapped up in themselves, alone with their reminiscences and their thoughts. Advantage was taken of this inaction, following so closely on so agitated a life, to collect and arrange the notes of the expedition, and occasionally to admire the new countries stretching out to the horizon.

Madame de Guéran, secluded in a cabin in the after part of the vessel, appeared very seldom. She was, perhaps, reproaching herself for her harshness towards him who was no more, and for the words which had escaped her during her interview with M. Delange. She forgot all the faults of her husband in remembering only the indomitable courage and resolution of the great explorer.

Dr. Delange had also lost some of his light-heartedness, and he felt acutely the sole reproach

addressed to him by M. de Morin. "Your admiration for African women, my dear friend," said the leader of the expedition to him, "has cost a man's life."

At Cairo the residue of the Nubians, the Soudan women, Nassar, and the Arabs took their departure, and all these faithful servants might very well exist for a long time on the handsome presents which were made to them.

The little European colony, left now to itself, after having embarked at Port Said, in the month of June, on board a steamer belonging to the *Messageries Maritimes*, arrived at Paris without any further delay.

Then came more adieux. Miss Poles said good-bye to her companions, who, although they had often made fun of her, fully appreciated her goodness, her devotion, and her courage. When the moment of departure arrived, and she had to tear herself away from the four men whom she had loved one by one, for whom she had burned with equal ardour, she forgot her latest preference for M. de Pommerelle and enfolded the whole lot in one embrace. From the arms of M. Périères she passed to those of M. de Morin, to fall into the embrace of M. Delange, who handed her over to the Count de Pommerelle. The Kings Munza and Kadjoro were alone wanting in this all-round embrace; if they had been present the *fête* would have been complete,

and Miss Poles would have bestowed one huge, universal kiss on those she had loved so well.

After having wiped her tear-dimmed spectacles, and thanked Madame de Guéran, who had just secured an independance for her during the remainder of her life, she betook herself to her beloved England, where she now indulges in the "cup which cheers but not inebriates" in the society of her friend, the confidant of her most secret thoughts, the sole depository of her famous adventures amongst the Thouaregs.

The faithful Joseph has not left, his master having too much need of him. M. de Morin is, if one may be allowed to say so, the living crown of Joseph's glory, the landmark of his courage. A dozen times a day the valet points out his young master to the servants and tradesmen of the neighbourhood, saying to them at the same time. "You see that young fellow over there? The Arabs were going to shoot him, but I rescued him. The Niam-Niam wanted to eat him, I offered myself as a sacrifice. The amazons were making ready to massacre him, I delivered him out of their hands." All the feats of arms performed by M. de Morin were inscribed on Joseph's record of service. History is often written thus, the parts being reversed, and the truly great are swallowed up by the really small.

The various Geographical Societies of Europe

did more justice to the de Guéran expedition, for although at first they received with a certain reserve the notes sent to them by an unknown explorer like M. Périères, they, in the course of time, officially accepted his discoveries, and replaced the words "unexplored regions" on their maps by the names of the Domondoos, the Maleggas, and the Walindis. Every day, moreover, some fresh traveller appears to confirm these discoveries, and quite lately, in the course of the year 1876, M. Gessi, one of Gordon's lieutenants, reported the existence of a second arm of the Nile, issuing, like its fellow, from the Albert-Nyanza, flowing westwards, and, according to the natives, rejoining the great river above Gondokoro. This is the arm of the Nile which M. Desrioux discovered and pointed out in 1874.

* * * * * *

Eighteen months elapsed without Madame de Guéran putting off her weeds, or showing any sign of marrying again.

"Why on earth does not she marry her dear doctor?" said M. de Morin one day to M. Delange. "They adore each other! That, alas! is easily seen, and I know the Baroness. She is just as incapable of shortening the term of her widowhood as she would be of breaking

her marriage vows. But I wish she would put an end to this state of things, and betake herself, as soon as possible, to the priest and the mayor."

"My dear fellow," replied Delange, "Périères last week said almost the same thing in the same words, but they were, like yours, so full of bitterness that I dared not repeat them to Madame de Guéran. If she were to hear either of you, so far from making up her mind, as you want her to do, she would wait still longer."

"According to you, her scruples and her delicacy as regards us are the real causes of the delay?"

"Yes, she wants to let time heal your wounds; she has so sincere a friendship for both of you that she would not wound you for the world."

"Then tell her, please, that we shall not have the sorrow of knowing even the date of her wedding. Our first journey has whetted our appetites; the feverish longing for discovery has taken possession of Périères, de Pommerelle, and myself, and in a few weeks we shall start for western Africa. Following the example of the brothers Lander, we shall follow the course of the Congo, and proceed, in a north-easterly direction, towards Lake Tanganyika. We are in earnest, you see, and Madame de Guéran may resume her freedom of action. We are

going to travel without her, and consequently she has a right to marry without us."

* * * * * *

Two months after this conversation Laura de Guéran became Madame Desrioux. The newly-married couple have retired to a villa on the borders of Lake Como, whose picturesque shores recall to their minds the Albert-Nyanza, near which they refound each other.

M. Delange and Joseph alone of all our heroes remain in Paris. The former is devoting himself to his profession, which does not prevent him, at midnight when his work is over, playing a rubber of whist, or making one at a baccarat table in his club. He it is, so report says, whom Gondinet and Félix Cohen have hit off in the second act of their capital play "*Le Club*." The doctor still dreams occasionally of the women of Africa, but he makes no secret of his opinion that several of his Parisian patients are their superiors.

Joseph betrayed a certain amount of indifference when the question of again setting out for Africa was mooted before him, and it is, moreover, quite possible that M. de Morin, with good reason for it, did not make a point of his accompanying him. The trusty valet is a valet no longer. He is a gentleman of independent means, thanks to the generosity of

his master, and the sale of thirty elephant's tusks.

As for ourselves, our task is ended, and with it this lengthy history, which has only one merit —that of being entirely exact from a geographical point of view, and with regard to African customs. We have thought that our readers might be interested in being taken far away from Paris, and in having brought before them, in a possibly attractive guise, laborious researches, interesting discoveries, and the mysteries of a new world.

THE END.

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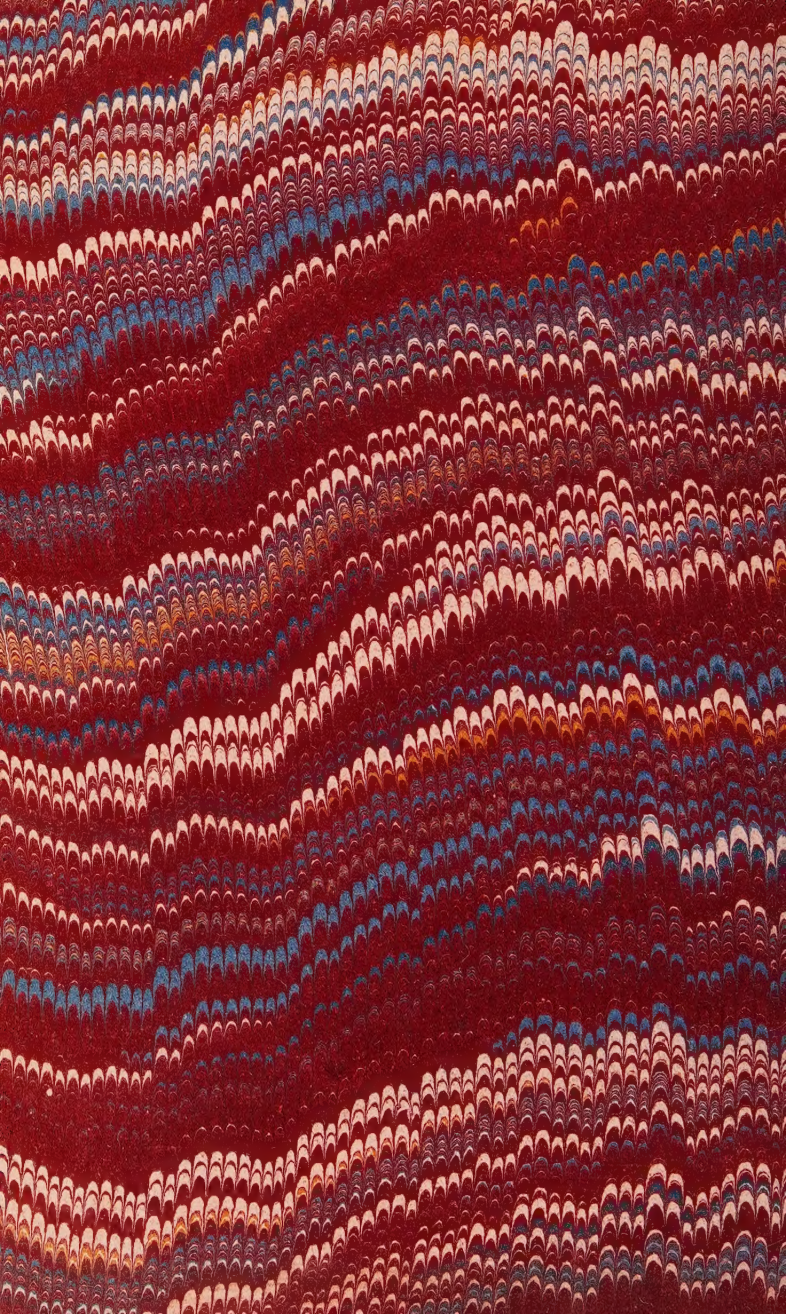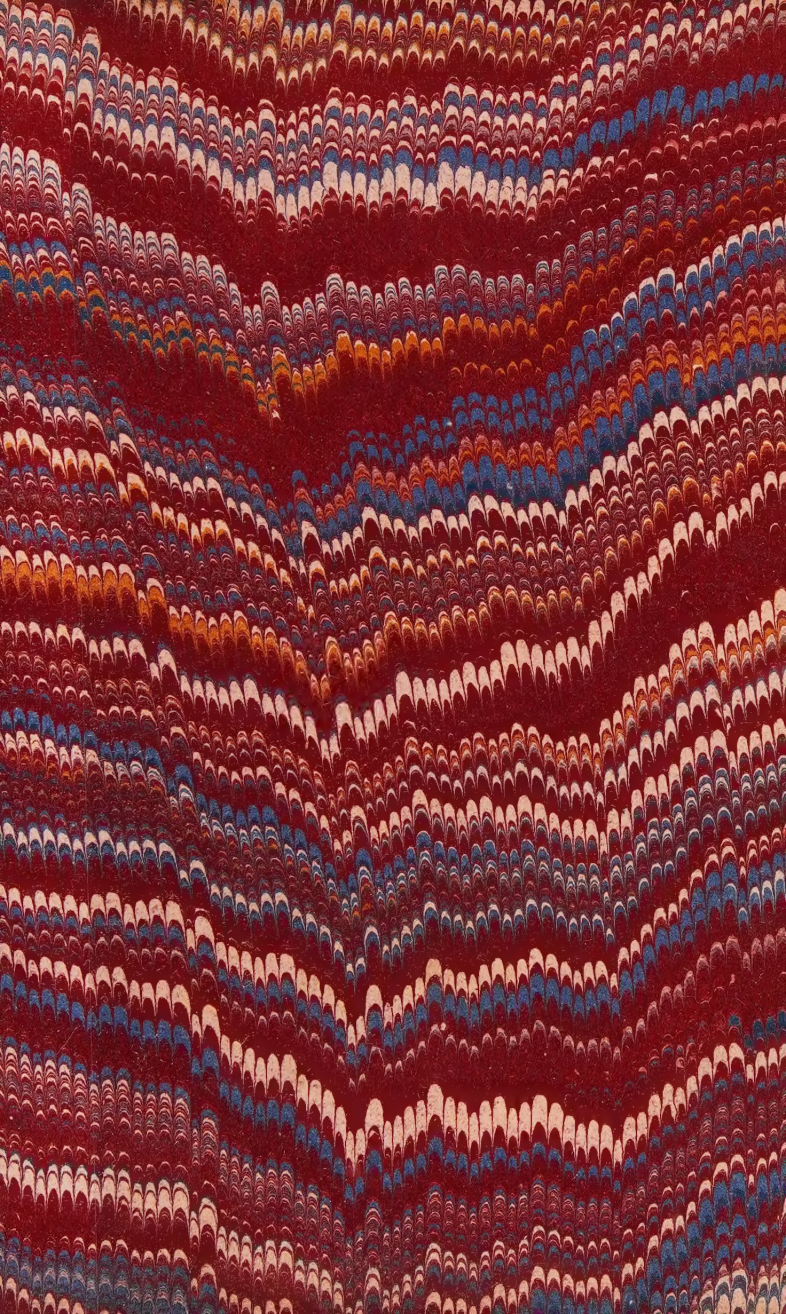
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